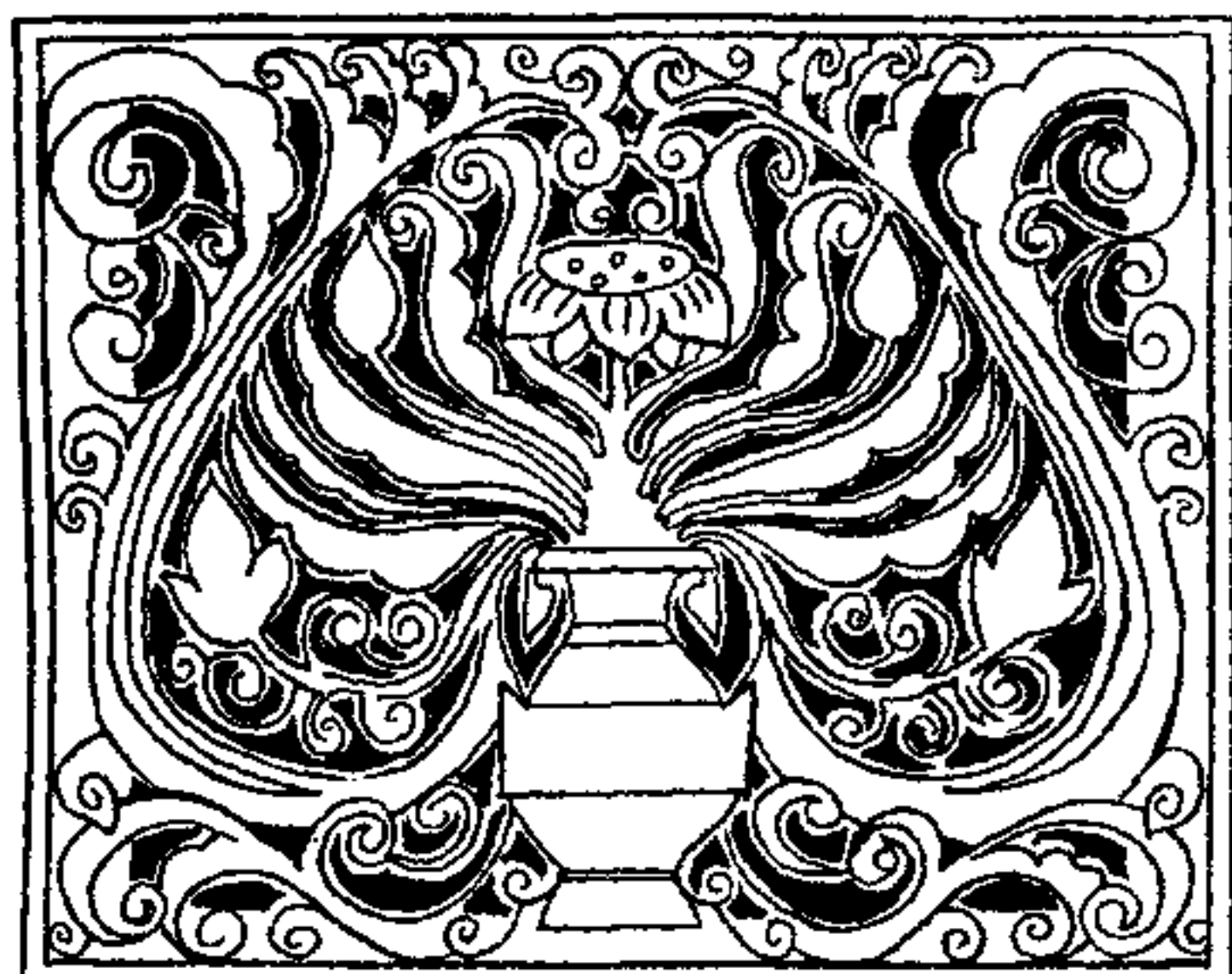




# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

A Monthly Journal of the  
Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

*Editorial Office*  
P.O. Mayavati, Via : Lohaghat  
Dt. Pithoragarh 262 524, U.P.

*Publication Office*  
5 Dehi Entally Road  
Calcutta 700 014

*Phone* (91)(33)244 0898  
(91)(33)245 2383  
(91)(33)226 8000  
*Fax* (91)(33)245 0050  
*Email:* advaita@giasl01.vsnl.net.in



## Rates of Subscription

(inclusive of Postage)

|                           | Annual  | Life<br>(20 Years) |
|---------------------------|---------|--------------------|
| India                     | Rs. 45  | Rs. 500            |
| Sri Lanka &<br>Bangladesh | Rs. 120 | Rs. 2000           |
| U.S.A. & Canada           |         |                    |
| Air Mail                  | \$20    | \$300              |
| Other Countries           |         |                    |
| Air Mail                  | £15     | £225               |

*Cover:* Sri Ramakrishna Temple  
Belur Math  
*Inset:* Prayer Hall

**MARCH 1998**

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उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

**ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED**

Vol. 103

MARCH 1998

No. 3

## Divine Wisdom

THE COMPLETION OF DAKSHA'S SACRIFICE  
(Hymns in Praise of Sri Hari)

भृगुरुवाच  
यन्मायया गहनयापहतात्मबोधा  
ब्रह्मादयस्तनुभृतस्तमसि स्वपन्तः।  
नात्मन् श्रितं तव विदन्त्यधुनापि तत्त्वं  
सोऽयं प्रसीदतु भवान् प्रणतात्मबन्धुः॥

*Bhrigu said:* All embodied beings, including Brahma, being caught in the sleep of ignorance by the influence of Thy invincible Maya and thereby deprived of the awareness of themselves as Spirit, are not able to grasp Thy truth, even though Thou abidest in them as their innermost self. May that Lord, the friend of all who take refuge in Him, be propitious unto me!

ब्रह्मोवाच  
नैतत्स्वरूपं भवतोऽसौ पदार्थ-  
भेदग्रहैः पुरुषो यावदीक्षेत्।  
ज्ञानस्य चार्थस्य गुणस्य चाश्रयो  
मायामयाद् व्यतिरिक्तो यतस्त्वम्॥

*Brahma said:* Thy real nature eludes the perception of men endowed with the power of seeing only differences. Though the ground of all things, be they manifest as centres of consciousness, objects or attributes, Thou transcendest all products of Thy mysterious power of Maya.

इन्द्र उवाच  
इदमप्यच्युत विश्वभावनं  
वपुरानन्दकरं मनोदृशाम्।  
सुरविद्विदक्षपणैरुदायुधैर्-  
भुजदण्डैरुपपन्नमष्टभिः॥

*Indra said:* O changeless one! This form of Thine, with the divine weapons uplifted in Thy eight arms for the suppression of evil-doers, is the source of all formful existences and a fount showering bliss on the eyes and the minds of all.



## Fixing the Mind on God - II

No one asks how to fix the mind on the objects of the senses. It seems so natural. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* states the condition of men and women in those memorable words:

*Parāñci klāni vyatṛṇat svayambhū-  
stasmātparāñpaśyati nāntarātman;  
Kaściddhūraḥ pratyagātmānamaikṣa-  
dāvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvamicchan.*

*The self-existent Lord destroyed the outgoing senses. Therefore one sees the outer things and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes away and then sees the indwelling Self. (II.i.1)*

By 'destroyed the outgoing senses' is meant that by making the senses go outward towards their objects, the senses had become afflicted, killed so to say. This destruction was made by God Himself. Yet it was not His goal to achieve the destruction of the senses by making the senses go outward, but it was His aim that men and women discover the way by which they could reverse this current of flow, turn their 'eyes' (meaning all the sense organs) *inward*. As it were this is a puzzle placed before humanity and God Himself is our helper in solving it. By following the natural inclination of the senses one is led to destruction. There is the hint to make the senses turn inward. Not many attempt to do this, and among those who do attempt not all succeed either.

The *Bhagavad Gita* highlights this fact in its verse (7.3):

*Manuṣyāṇāṃ sahasreṣu  
kaścidyatati siddhaye;*

*Yatatāmapi siddhānām  
kaścinnām vetti tattvataḥ.*

*Among thousands of men one perchance struggles for perfection; even amongst those that struggle (one perchance becomes perfect), and even amongst those that are perfect, one perchance knows Me in reality.*

One must struggle for perfection even after knowing that the odds are not that favourable. The reason is that struggle is the only way to reach perfection, and it is only the perfect individual who has a possibility of knowing his true nature. As allowing the senses to have their free play takes us towards our destruction, it is necessary to struggle to bring the outgoing senses under our control and direct them within. This struggle is arduous like waging a war, as it is against the nature's current that we then travel. By pointing out that very few take recourse to this method and that even amongst them only a few succeed, it is conveyed that those who have a spiritual inclination are fortunate. Yet without giving way to complacency, they must struggle on till the goal is reached, because the path is slippery and as sharp as the razor's edge.

Swami Vivekananda speaking on the difficulties that lie on the road to spirituality says<sup>1</sup>:

It is in the nature of things that many should fall, that troubles should come, that tremendous difficulties should arise, that

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 8, p. 383. [Hereafter CW].

selfishness and all the other devils in the human heart should struggle hard when they are about to be driven out by the fire of spirituality. The road to the Good is the roughest and steepest in the universe. It is a wonder that so many succeed, no wonder that so many fall. Character has to be established through a thousand stumbles.

If one were to construct a spiritual model of the human being, he would see that it has an inner core which is divine; it is called the Atman. This Atman alone is luminous and conscious. It is surrounded by various sheaths, five in number, namely, the *ānandamaya kośa*, *viñānamaya kośa*, *manomaya kośa*, *prāṇamaya kośa* and *annamaya kośa*. The light of the Atman percolates through these five sheaths illuminating them with Its luminosity; the sheaths, otherwise dull and inert, shine with the light borrowed from Atman. Just as a bulb that emits white light appears to be emitting red light when it is covered with a red coloured paper, even so the powerful luminosity of the Atman is not seen because of the sheaths; what we see is the doer, the enjoyer, whereas the Atman is ever fulfilled and does not require to perform any action to enjoy the fruits thereof. Yet in every act, in every expression, the embodied being sends out pulses revealing the light of the Atman. Self-consciousness is the basis of all perception and that comes from the Atman alone.

Again, just as a prism of glass when it is placed near a red object appears to be red in colour, even so the Atman and the sheaths due to their close proximity exchange their characteristics: the sheaths appear to be sentient, luminous and capable of revealing their objects, while the reflected Atman, the individual being, thinks that he has sickness, old age, death and all such transformations of the body, that he has wisdom, better intelligence, greater memory, life, happiness and all such characteristics which belong to

the other sheaths.

There is a nice simile to explain this exchange. The river Ganges, laden as it is with mud, is not clear and it looks very dull. One full-moon night, the moon, having risen high in the sky and filled the earth with its soothing light, looked below at the Ganges and found that the reflections of the moon from the many shattering waves were breaking! The Ganges also looked at her own self and found that the waves on its surface appeared to be glittering. Thus, while the moon felt dejected under the wrong idea that it was breaking to pieces, the Ganges felt immensely delighted believing that her usually dull muddy water had become radiant.

Due to the composite nature of the human being, he exhibits sometimes the tendency to manifest his divine nature and at other times, his material nature. When the emphasis is on the sheaths, he exhibits a tendency towards material pursuits. Most persons fall in this category. Some rare ones however try to take a firm seat on their Atman-nature, and that is what the verse from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* insists, only some rare ones do. That is why the number of persons who are truly spiritual is always small in number. Even they who take to spiritual life keep vacillating between spiritual and material tendencies until they stabilize themselves and become rooted in their real nature. The initial struggles which every aspirant faces may appear too formidable and sometimes very unnerving too. Unfortunately many give up the struggle. Some fight with tenacity. The war has to be waged with patience, alertness and agility, and victory obtained at all costs.

Sri Ramakrishna mentions four classes of people: the bound, those aspiring after realization, the liberated, and the ever-per-



fect. In the simile he presents<sup>2</sup> he says:

This world is like a fishing-net. Men are the fish, and God, whose *māyā* has created this world, is the fisherman. When the fish are entangled in the net, some of them try to tear through its meshes in order to get their liberation. They are like the men striving after liberation. But by no means all of them escape. Only a few jump out of the net with a loud splash, and then people say, 'Ah! There goes a big one!' In the like manner, three or four men attain liberation. Again, some fish are so careful by nature that they are never caught in the net; some beings of the ever-perfect class, like Nārada, are never caught in the meshes of worldliness. Most of the fish are trapped; but they are not conscious of the net and of their immanent death. No sooner are they entangled than they run headlong, net and all, trying to hide themselves in the mud. They don't make the least effort to get free. On the contrary, they go deeper and deeper into the mud. These fish are like the bound men. They are still inside the net, but they think that they are quite safe there. A bound creature is immersed in worldliness, in 'woman and gold', having gone deep into the mire of degradation. But still he believes he is quite happy and secure. The liberated, and the seekers after liberation, look on the world as a deep well. They do not enjoy it. Therefore, after the attainment of Knowledge, the realization of God, some give up their bodies. But such a thing is rare indeed.'

Most men and women find delight in the world of the senses. They do not want anyone to break their dreams. Those who try to help them see things rightly are said to be frustrated; they are not considered interesting any more. There is a philosophy which suggests that the goal of life is to live happily as long as one lives, to drink clarified butter even if it meant that one had to take loans! The world never loses its charm for those

who mould their lives on this philosophy. They never think that there will come a day when their faculties, which daily lose their vigour, will one day be non-functioning, that death will sooner or later catch up with them. And even if death does call them away from the scene, they believe that it is only right and proper to enjoy as much as possible, so long as possible. They think that the world with all its fanciful though impermanent things will give them lasting support. Like the fish entangled in the net which take support in the mud, such men find that the world gives them all the support that they require. Sitting in the precincts of a temple they play cards as if it was not yet time to call on God. The world is such a tangible reality, and God not visible at all to the senses, they believe that it is foolish to give up the world (a bird in the hand) and reach out for God (a bird in the bush). They do not like to hear such pronouncements as that there is no joy in the finite, that all joy is in the Infinite. It is easy to see that their time has not come yet, that they have to go through the experiences of enjoyment and suffering, may be for many lives, before they come to truly understand the evanescence of all worldly objects. The quest for the permanent amidst the impermanent is yet far away from them and so they do not have the question: how to fix the mind on God? A fact which applies to many is:

We want everything but spirituality. ...Luxuries are not wants, but necessities are wants. Religion is a necessary thing to very few; and to the vast mass of mankind it is a luxury.<sup>3</sup>

Describing the nature of the bound soul, Sri Ramakrishna says:

The camel loves to eat thorny bushes. The more it eats the thorns, the more the blood gushes from the mouth. Still it must eat thorny plants

2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994), pp. 164-5. Hereafter *Gospel*].

3. CW., vol. 9, p. 226.



and will never give them up. The man of worldly nature suffers so much sorrow and affliction, but he forgets it all in a few days and begins his old life all over again.... The bound soul may have realized that there is no substance to the world—that the world is like a hog plum, only stone and skin—but still he cannot give it up and turn his mind to God.... There is another characteristic of the bound soul. If you remove him from the worldly surroundings to a spiritual environment, he will pine away. The worm that grows in filth feels very happy there. It thrives in filth. It will die if you put it in a pot of rice.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the bound soul is not without hope. If by the grace of God he develops a strong spirit of renunciation, if he cultivates a restlessness for God, then even a bound soul will strive for God vision. That requires the grace of God and God-men. The spiritual history of mankind is replete with many examples where confirmed sinners have been redeemed in miraculous ways.

Those who are ever-perfect are never caught in the trap. Some are so big, like Swamiji, that the net of *māyā* appears inadequate in size when it tries to entangle them. Some others are so minute, like Nag Mahashaya, that the meshes of the net are too big to hold them in captivity. Such persons always remain immersed in the thought of God. They do not have the many problems which those struggling for perfection have to face. They too practise meditation and prayer, but these practices are performed after they have reached the goal.

It is only those struggling for perfection who, when they practise spiritual disciplines, find many problems. The reason is that there is within their minds latent impressions of many past lives which stand as obstacles on the path to spiritual progress. If one swims along with nature's current then

one does not feel that one has to put in great labour; however, when one tries to swim against the current of nature, a relentless war is in the offing. Sometimes some obstacles appear too formidable and the aspirant gets stuck up. Only those who have reached the goal can guide such persons. It is therefore necessary to study the lives of saints and live our lives according to their guidance. We must not lose sight of the fact that religion has to be lived, that by being religious we are trying to bring about a change in our personality, and that religious growth requires great patience:

Religion is a realization, not talk, not doctrines, nor theories, however beautiful all these may be. Religion is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging. It is not an intellectual assent; but one's whole nature becoming changed into it. Such is religion. By an intellectual assent we can come to a hundred sort of foolish things, and change the next day, but this being and becoming is what is religion.<sup>5</sup>

So we have to realise religion, and this realisation of religion is a long process. When men hear of something very high and wonderful, they all think they will get that, and never stop for a moment to consider that they will have to work their way up to it; they all want to jump there. If it is the highest, we are for it. We never stop to consider whether we have the power, and the result is that we do not do anything. You cannot take a man with a pitchfork and push him up there; we all have to work up gradually.... Religion is a long, slow process.<sup>6</sup>

Let us therefore strive to progress in our spiritual journey with diligence, patience, tenacity, humility, and faith in God.

*(to be continued)*

5. CW., vol. 9, p. 543.

6. CW., vol. 4, pp. 35-6.

4. Gospel, p. 165.

*In order to arrive at possessing everything,  
Desire to possess nothing.*

—St. John of the Cross



# Science of Man's Inner and Outer Life

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

*A Question-Answer Session on Boston Radio Station in May 1981*

*Questioners: Lilian Travalini and Mahesh Sharma*

**Q.** *Swamiji, in the West, particularly the young people think that religion and science are at two opposite poles, and I see from one of the brochures that you are going to speak at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology\* on the scientific view of religion. So could you give us a preview of that idea?*

**A.** Yes, it is a very crucial subject for people today. For centuries science and religion have been apart. However, there is a better appreciation now of the basic harmony between man's spiritual life and current physical science. Fortunately, the developments in physical science itself, in physics and biology, made possible this getting closer of religion and science. When I use the word 'religion', I mean the science of religion, because there can be a religion without a scientific approach to it, as for instance in institutional religions and ethnic religions. But true religion is a science of man's inner life.

**Q.** *Swamiji, the approach taken to understand scientific phenomena is logical, it is sequential thought. But religious thought seems to be based on intuition, faith and experience. How do you combine those two approaches?*

**A.** You deal with science, say with physical science; it is the science of the physical world which environs us. There we are dealing with something objective. But even there, when you go deep enough, as in nuclear science, the objective/subjective demarcations slowly melt away. When you deal with man in depth, you are dealing with 'being', not with something like an object in

front of you. It is here that logic and reason transcend their limitations. They are not anti-logic or anti-reason. They just transcend their limitations because a new, big datum, man's consciousness, man's Self, comes into the picture along with the objective world. Therefore, reason becomes enlarged. It is not destroyed, but transcended into something higher—you may call it intuition or whatever. In all religions, 'knowing' tends to 'being'. You 'be', and not just 'know'. That is the meaning of religion. For example, I know a table, something objective, something out there. But here you are being something. In the highest expression of religion which obtains in the Upanishads of India, you *are* that Self. Not that you *know* that, but you *are* that: *Tat-tvam-asi*. We say, in religious language, you are a child of God. You *are* — not that you know something; you *are*. The word 'are' means 'being'. So, all 'knowing' tends to 'being' when you come to the inner side of life. In the external side, 'knowing' never tends to 'being'. When you study a chair, you do not *become* a chair.

**Q.** *How does one do this? For a westerner, it is very difficult to understand.*

**A.** It is not very difficult. In these last two centuries, however, it has become difficult as we have forgotten the western mystical tradition. There also it was all 'being'. In Saint Augustine's description of his own spiritual realization, you find that this kind of 'knowing' tends to 'being'. And it is there that knowledge rises to wisdom. It is in 'being' that you get wisdom; otherwise, it is merely informational knowledge. Unless it does so, knowledge will be increasing sor-

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\* This lecture will appear in the next issue.



row, as remarked by the late Bertrand Russell: 'unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, an increase in knowledge shall be an increase of sorrow.'

That is actually what we are seeing today. So, today's tendency—to rise beyond knowledge to wisdom—is also the tendency to rise beyond logical knowledge to experience, to 'being'. This is further heightened by a new development in the concept of education. UNESCO has established a commission to study post-war education and recommend reforms. It was presided over by the French Prime Minister of the time, Edgar (Fabre). It has recommended its own scheme of education in a book—and that book has a wonderful title: *Learning to Be*, not 'learning to do' but 'learning to be'. In this scheme you have the first touch of the idea of the spiritual element in man, of man being educated to appreciate that spiritual element and to experience it. That will be a beautiful natural development.

**Q.** *Swamiji, you referred to the Upanishads, where we read: aham brahmāsmi, sarvam khalvindaṁ brahma, neha nānāsti kiñcana. And then we read in the Bible: 'I am that', or 'Through Me you can reach My Father', 'I am love'. Now the ideals are very high, and for the layman the process is through the institutional religion. How can one either realize that, or reach that realization through shorter cuts? Or by steps, perhaps?*

**A.** Shorter cuts we can try, but not cheaper cuts, because this is a profound theme—to restore man to his own integrity. We are doing this today very often, even in psychiatry. A man loses his self-hood, we restore it to him. By psychiatry we restore an emotionally disturbed child to his own selfhood. This is the application of that Vedantic science of man in depth, known as *Adhyātma Vidyā*, whereby man realizes himself as the Atman, as the ever-free, ever-pure Self. We have forgotten it, but we can get it back. That

is the whole training of life, it is not a subject apart from life; for, in and through life itself this consciousness is to be brought into being.

**Q.** *How does one get it back?*

**A.** That is what we do by regular training. In fact, it is a science and a technique in itself. Vedanta, Yoga, are treated as a science in itself. You can find it in all the world's religions, provided you are able to look for that scientific element in all these religions. Religious traditions contain things that are rational, scientific, human and also things that are irrational, simple magic and miracle, and a lot of superstition as well. We have to find out what is really conducive to human spiritual growth and we shall find it there. This is a science of human development, just like evolution: physical evolution, organic evolution and what lies beyond. And today that is the main interest: man evolving in a higher dimension, his own mind and consciousness coming into the picture.

**Q.** *Swamiji, in western psychology, where the ego gets the major emphasis, the focus is the ego. But when we look at the eastern psychology, or philosophy, one has to kill that ego.*

**A.** No, ego is the focus of eastern philosophy and psychology also, but it is only the initial datum, not the final word. We treat the ego as initial data—like the tip of a rock—, projecting above the water level; but deep down, it is an immense rock. Similarly, at the sensate level, you see the self to be a tiny ego, limited by the organic system. But it is really infinite in nature. It is this lesson that is conveyed in the beautiful dictum of the Upanishads, *tat-tvam-asi*, You are That. You are not this tiny thing, this organically limited ego—that is just the promise of greater things to come. Infinite possibilities are lying within you. Try to unfold them. And that is a science, a technique. From childhood we have to be initiated into this great process, which will be the real growth of man: physical, intellectual and spiritual.



**Q.** *Swamiji, I have been observing two phenomena. One is that every religion is getting more and more conservative, which means that more and more narrowness is coming into religion; and at the same time, there is a group of people who are spreading their arms to embrace other religions. Now, do you see this as contradictory, or do you find any other meaning to this?*

**A.** Our age is a strange age because all isolation is gone. We are being thrown into the mainstream of both national and international life. So all sorts of polarizations are taking place. When religions are attacked by modern scepticism and rationalism, religions begin to go back into their shells, and fundamentalist thinking becomes prominent. It is a spirit of survival, many organisms have it. But there is no need to go to that other extreme. We are passing through a stage of pendulum swinging, from one extreme to the other. We have to bring the pendulum to rest in the centre. Today you also see the tendency of science to come closer to the spiritual view of the universe to what we call a non-mechanistic view of the universe—both in nuclear physics as well as in biology. More and more scientists are throwing away the mechanistic view of human development, or embryonic development. So, this coming of science to a non-mechanistic view brings it closer to the spirit of religion. Fundamentalism is more of a political phenomenon today. We have to take religion as a science of human growth; then this fundamental approach will not be there. We have to overcome it by stressing the scientific character of man's spiritual development and fulfilment. That is the work hereafter.

**Q.** *Do you foresee this happening, or will there be problems in this development?*

**A.** Tremendous problems, stresses and strains will arise. After all, it is going to be one of the most tremendous revolutions in human history. It is tremendous because physical science has understood the world

so thoroughly and yet man is not happy or fulfilled. We are still seeking something. All cheap religious cults come to us only because we are holding on to a straw to save one's self. Why should you hold on to a straw? There is a science of religion as valuable, as tangible, and as strong as the physical sciences. The physical sciences have helped us to build a wealthy, vigorous, materialistic civilization. Why not combine with it spiritual wealth obtained by the pursuit of the science of religion?

**Q.** *Swamiji, generally people who take a narrow view will quote something or the other from their own scriptures. For example, a Christian might take a statement from the Bible saying that through Me only can you reach; or, a Hindu can take the statement, sarva-dharmān parityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja; or, a Muslim can take the view that Prophet Mohammed is the last prophet and that He is the culmination of all richness and laws. How do you reconcile those statements?*

**A.** Out of all these different systems which you just mentioned, only the Hindu has also got another view. It accepts all these other views. There is nothing dogmatic about the Hindu view. Since it accepts other lines of development in spiritual life, he can harmonize all these. So long as it is growth, that is enough. Whatever methods you adopt, grow spiritually, become wider. Your love, your affection, your concept of human development—they should not become narrow. Let them go beyond the limitations of your own tiny ego and organic system.

**Q.** *Swamiji, in the Bible it says that by the fruits you will be known, and in older scriptures also there are similar references. What are the characteristics of a person who has realized?*

**A.** That is a beautiful thing to know because it is the test of religion. In science there is a test. For example, you discover folic acid in the laboratory, and test it in the hospital to see what results come. Similarly, take the



case of a man. He holds a belief and we just inquire about the nature of his life. Is it better? Is it purer? Is there more love and compassion in it? If so, the belief is true; otherwise, it is not a true belief in the world of religion. So, the concept that by their fruits ye shall know them is called the testing of a religious profession, religious belief, religious dogma. This test must be continuously applied. Only then shall we have the science of religion in operation for human development, less of conflict, and more of true growth.

**Q.** *What about prayer, and the answer to prayer?*

**A.** That is an important discipline in the science of religion. It is a technique. Just as there are varieties of scientific techniques in the physical sciences, so in religion. Here the whole of the human mind becomes a laboratory, and you are trying to find out what is at the back of the human Self, of the human ego, of the human consciousness. Prayer is one of the methods to deepen one's awareness and to go deeper into the infinitude of God hidden in all of us.

**Q.** *Swamiji, many people in the West equate Hindu philosophy and thought with karma and reincarnation. What is the place of these two in the scientific view of religion?*

**A.** First of all, people must learn that these are not fundamental to Hinduism. They are part of the Hindu scheme of understanding human life. *Karma* and reincarnation play a good part in the ethical life of man. Whatever we are is the result of whatever we were before. In the Bible you read, 'whatsoever a man soweth, that he shall also reap'. That is called *Karma* theory. If you want to abolish that theory, you must bring something else to explain the diversities of life. Some theologians bring in the devil, a very unscientific notion. If you banish the devil, the theory of *karma* has to come in to explain the diversities in human life. Now we find that this single physical manifestation of life is insufficient to work out one's *karma*, one's im-

pressions, one's desires, one's objectives. Every man has two bodies: a physical gross body and a psychic subtle body. The subtle (psychic) body consists of all the impressions of our actions and everything that we do. Every action produces a result in the world outside, as well as in the human mind. The totality of impressions resides in the subtle body. At death it is the gross body that disappears, but the real man is that subtle body. When you are in the waking state, you find that you are unconscious of the subtle processes. Nevertheless, the fact is that after death the subtle body continues to exist and it manufactures a new gross body for itself. That is called reincarnation. Even now it is the subtle body that manufactures the blood in your system, develops new cells, etc. It does everything, but you don't know it because your consciousness has not the capacity to understand this. In the new life this is exactly what happens. The subtle body manufactures a new body for itself to work out its own desires, its own urges, etc. Thus, we go from birth to birth, and from death to death, until we realize the truth. After that there is no coming and there is no going. That truth is one's own infinite, divine nature.

**Q.** *Swamiji, when we look at the number of religions or cults which have sprung up in the United States, we are really confounded. Can you give some criteria by which you can say: yes, you can look at this, analyse it, or leave it?*

**A.** In the West, especially in America, people are baffled by this proliferation. But we in India are not baffled at all, for, where there is freedom, there are always new movements taking birth and new experiments being conducted. Where there is no freedom, where there is regimentation, everything is quiet. In India, freedom was an essential condition of religion. Man is completely free to pursue whatever religion he chooses. There is therefore variety in India. In America everything was uniformity till now,



which position is being given up. Now there is more of a pluralistic approach to human society. The result is a spawning of new sects and new creeds, because there is not a central church to suppress them. Whenever there is a central church to suppress, there will be none of these. As in politics, in a regimented political society, you will have only one party, not two or three. Once you have freedom, there will be plenty of parties standing for election. You find in America today a phenomenon which appeared in India much earlier, was sponsored and supported by the Indian spirit, and resulted in such a variety of religion. But what these nations must understand today is that behind this variety they must be able to see a central thread of unity. Only then variety will be a social strength. India discovered this ages ago. Its philosophy, spiritual vision, and socio-cultural policy exhibit unity in diversity, and not dull, dead uniformity.

**Q.** *Swamiji, if India discovered this unity of religions, and were so advanced, how is it that physically, materially, they are having problems?*

**A.** It is a relevant question, especially for a citizen of America. America is a young nation, 500 years old. It is like a young boy of twenty-five years, who has lived a good life and has a good time. If the boy grows into a man and lives upto seventy years, he would have seen ups and downs in life. India has lived a long life. It has seen ups and downs in history. That is why its attitude is more mature. It understands what is what. It has seen great prosperity, great development—including scientific development—in the past. It has also seen occasional depressions. When human energy is at the lowest, then all misfortunes come. Poverty, for example, is not a constant sore in Indian history. Several times it was highly prosperous, exporting most of the manufactured goods. Up to AD 1850, India was manufacturing plenty of goods and exporting them. After that it became an importer of manufactured goods

and an exporter of raw materials. This was due to the Imperial British connections. That is changing today and a new India is rising to that economic strength which it had previously. Poverty, backwardness, etc. are not constant features. It is a question of applying science and technology through human development. This, India is doing today.

**Q.** *Swamiji, how can one redeem oneself from the effect of past bad karma?*

**A.** The *karma* theory is a cause and effect theory, determinism, but it is self-determinism, not determinism by somebody else. A creature is determined by Nature outside; but man is partly a creature and partly a free individual. So, he can take up that free aspect of himself and overcome the causality and determinism that nature dictates to him. That is why, behind the *karma* and reincarnation theory is the central theory of Vedanta, that man is essentially free. He is the Atman, ever free. That is his true nature. Combine these two and you will have all the methods. You can either go down as a creature or rise up as a free soul. And Vedanta exhorts you to become free, which is your birthright. So I conclude this beautiful interview with a reference to a great teaching of the Upanishads—it is an exhortation to all humanity: *uttiṣṭhata jāgrata, prāpya varān nibodhata; kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā, durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti*, Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached. The path is very hard, like walking on the edge of a razor, so say the sages. Therefore, awake, don't proceed sleepily, sauntering, but in an awakened condition. □

*Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. Thou hast given me all that I am and all that I possess. I surrender it all to Thee that Thou mayest dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me but Thy love and Thy grace; these are sufficient for me, and I will have no more to desire.*

—St. Ignatius Loyola



# Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad

SWAMI SRIDHARANANDA

(Continued from previous issue)

प्रणवो धनुः शरो ह्यात्मा ब्रह्म तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते।  
अप्रेमत्तेन वेद्ध्यं शरवत्तन्मयो भवेत्॥

*Praṇavo dhanuḥ, śaro hy-ātmā,  
brahma tallakṣyam-ucyate;  
Apramattena veddhyam,  
śaravat-tanmayo bhavet. (II.ii.4)*

*The mystic syllable, Om is the bow. The soul (Atman with adjuncts, i.e. jīva) is the arrow, Brahman is said to be the target. It is to be penetrated by an undistracted (unerring) mind. The jīva should become one with It, just as the arrow (with the mark).*

The teacher said in the previous *mantra* that the great weapon of the Upaniṣads is the bow. Further, the essence of the Upaniṣads is called indescribable. But that definition is rather vague. So he now specifically mentions the *praṇava* as the essence. This *Omkāra* is the symbol of the Supreme, which is both immanent and transcendent. The way we are constituted today, we are unable to concentrate on something devoid of name-form-qualities. So even *Omkāra* as the symbol of that Reality is beyond our comprehension. Hence, we concentrate on the alphabets—A, U, M and *ardhanāda*—thus concretising *Omkāra* in the shape of the letters of the alphabet.

It is said that Atman or Brahman is omnipresent. To clarify this, the wise men mention three aspects of the universe: the gross (*sthūla*)—tangible things grasped by the external faculties of vision, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. The letter 'A' represents this gross aspect within the range

of sense perception. The subtle (*sūkṣma*) aspect is grasped by the intellect—general ideas or concepts or principles which are represented by the letter 'U'. Then comes the causal (*kāraṇa*) aspect of the world which is represented by the letter 'M'. But if there is only one Reality, why do we see so many? Because of the basic ignorance of the one underlying Truth, these three aspects are seen. That One, symbolized by the *ardha mātṛā* or *nāda*—nasal resonance, suggests that there is something beyond the universe which is permanent and eternal, on which the three aspects—*kāraṇa*, *sūkṣma* and *sthūla*—are imagined. There is a definite highest common factor immanent in the gross, the subtle and the causal aspects. Thus, the *Omkāra* or *Praṇava* is compared to the bow.

In spite of being advised to the contrary a thousand times, we keep thinking to ourselves that we are the body and identify ourselves with our sex, family, caste, religion, nation, etc., looking upon these as the characteristics of our true self. This is the error (*pramattatā*) mentioned in this *mantra*. A confused, hesitant, doubtful, shaky state of mind about the goal exists in us, so that our minds cannot concentrate in a particular, one-pointed direction. Since there is no conviction, there is also no confidence. But this view of individuality is an error and reveals a confused understanding. To remember even once, that this commonly held view is of my apparent self, is to make Brahman the goal, which goal has to be pierced without any *pramattatā* (conceptual confusion) regarding Reality. By practising the

discipline laid down to control the mind-body faculties, self-mastery is gained. The discipline is practised with the conviction that unless I gather all my energies, I will not develop the confidence or possess the determination to move in the right direction. The disciplines mentioned are *viveka*, *vairāgya*, *śama*, *dama*, *uparati*, *titikṣā*, *āsteya*, *aparigraha*, etc.—in fact, the whole gamut of morals. The whole enterprise is such that a lacking in any psycho-physical power is sure to lead to failure. Such an *pramatta* (careless) person is the *jīvātmā*, the embodied being.

The term Atman has a very flexible usage. Usually it means the goal, *Saccidānanda* Atman or Brahman but here in this *mantra* it stands for the aspirant to that goal. He is ignorant about his true nature, but the desire to know is paramount in him. We are ordinary *jīvas* but he is an aspiring *jīva* who fulfils the preconditions necessary to compare his *kriyā* to the sharpened arrow strung on the bow, drawn to the ear, and released with utmost concentration and aim to pierce the target thereby losing his separate identity in the target: *taumayo bhavet*. Sri Rama-krishna's parable is most apt here: the doll made of salt goes to measure the depth of the sea and gets dissolved in it. Loss of *jīvatva* (state of embodiment) is really the loss of separate identity, ignorance, limitations, smallness and pettiness by merging the individual in the Cosmic Self.

The procedure to saturate water with sugar is to keep on adding sugar to water. The mind is a receptive solvent and the aspirant adds the suggestion '*aham brahmāsmi*, I am Brahman' to the mind; and desists from adding the suggestion that 'I am the body, mind, sense-organs, etc.'. This is the 'sugar' added to the mind and personality till it is so saturated with the idea that you lose your separate identity born of identification with the body, mind, etc.

So, this suggestion to myself, that I am not this name-form but only Atman, is an auto-suggestion. Intellectuals may regard this as a process of self-hypnosis and might even say that religion is the opium of the masses. But Swami Vivekananda replied that we are actually under the hypnosis of selfhood, *jīvātmā*; we are really dehypnotizing ourselves. Looking upon ourselves as this and that right from childhood is self-hypnosis. We now dehypnotize ourselves by suggesting that we are not all these fanciful things, that we are in our true original nature *Saccidānanda* Atman. So, this auto-suggestion is not to be looked down upon. We are not mortal but we are the very divine.

Secondly, we must begin by concentrating on *saguṇa*, *sākāra*, *savikalpa* *Īśvara*—the Infinite Absolute conceived as having a divine human form, devoid of weakness and endowed with divine qualities. *Avatāravāda* (doctrine of Incarnation of God) is based on the conviction that God out of compassion takes the form of our *Īṣṭa* (Chosen Deity) so that we may understand spiritual truths quickly and better. And this *Īṣṭa*, *Bhagavān* is *ṣaḍ-guṇa-sampannaḥ* (a repository of six divine qualities) like *sarva-īśitva* (lordship over all), *sarva-draṣṭṛtva* (witness of all), *sarva-kartṛtva* (doer of all deeds), etc. We concentrate our thoughts on our *Īṣṭa* and repeat His name in *japa* to become one with the ideas conveyed by this name, *tadārtha bhāvanam*. The danger of confusion, of going wrong in forcing oneself to concentrate on something beyond one's capacity—the *nirguṇa* Brahman, the Absolute—, is avoided. According to the *Sādhana-pāda*, the *savikalpa* is *vikalpa sahita* (accompanied with modification), thereby giving us more options to choose from. This *Īṣṭa* of ours, if He so desires to guide us, to make us more mature, can ensure that His *rūpa* (form) disappears but His *guṇas* (attributes) may saturate our being (*nirākāra saguṇa*), or, His form may remain during concentration and the attributes too



come to our mind during that time (*sākāra saguṇa*). He guides us to our welfare in the best manner though the path may not be to our liking. Ultimately our ego itself will totally vanish into the Absolute; the *jīva*'s separate identity disappears.

The goal of life is *jīvanmukti* (freedom while living, oneness with Brahman). We want wealth, reputation, or anything else because it gives us *sukha*, peace, tranquillity, joy. But, we are not sure *what* will give us that joy. Only *jīvanmukti* gives *parama sukha*—total cessation of *duḥkha* (sorrow) and never-ending *sukha* (joy). Śaṅkara gives an example of the sign of a *jīvanmukta puruṣa*: Imagine an earthen pot with innumerable holes in it and place a lamp within it. The light emanates through all the holes. So, a *jīvanmukta puruṣa* emanates confidence, peace, tranquillity, from every pore of his body. And this is the very purpose of life. Sri Ramakrishna used to mention an example: peeling off the skins of the onion, till no layer of onion remains. So, we have to keep descaling ourself of the *upādhis* (limiting adjuncts gathered by ourselves) till they no longer exist. Then, *jīvāhood* will end and Brahman alone will remain.

यस्मिन्द्यौः पृथिवी चान्तरिक्ष-  
मोतं मनः सह प्राणैश्च सर्वैः।  
तमेवैकं जानथ आत्मानमन्या  
वाचो विमुञ्चथामृतस्यैष सेतुः॥

Yasmin-dyauḥ prthivī cāntarikṣam  
otam manah saha prāṇaiś-ca sarvair;  
Tam-evaikaṁ jānatha ātmānam-anya  
vāco vimuñcattha-amṛtasyaiṣa  
setuḥ. (II.ii.5)

He on whom are woven the heaven, the earth and the interspace, and the mind and the vital force together with all the other organs, know Him (that Self) alone as being the one without a second and give up all other talks. This is the bridge, *sādhana*, to immor-

talinity (liberation).

The teacher is aware that by his stating the Absolute Truth in the previous two *mantras* the student is likely to take to the wrong path. So, he immediately gives the corrective to ensure that the student does not commit the error.

He, on whom is strung the earth, the sky and the atmosphere (*bhūḥ, bhuvaḥ* and *svaḥ*), the mind, the life-breaths together with all the sense-organs, is Atman or Brahman. It is like the snake appearing in the rope. The emanation is not *tāttvika*, real; it is merely a projection of our imagination. The *sādhaka* generally makes a mistake and concludes that this world is *mithyā-māyā*, false. The question is: how does it appear to us, if it is false? We do not know the idea conveyed by the term *mithyā-māyā*. We take it to mean that the world is non-existent. That is not the idea of spiritual life and *sādhana*. In the first stage we admit the existence of diversity revealed by the five senses. So long as I do not perceive Atman or Brahman and It remains merely a vague intellectual thought for us, the world grasped by the five senses is a concrete and tangible reality. The teacher starts by saying that we must analyse this concrete, solid, tangible world of ours. There is existence ('is-ness') in everything which is ever-changing, but we do not see the unchanging Brahman's 'is-ness'. Ultimate analysis shows this *sattā* (existence) to be *caitanya* (conscious principle). Thus, we are educated to distinguish between the appearance and the Reality behind it. The seeing of the universe of *nāma-rūpa* is not being challenged; our eyes do not have to be plucked out to see Brahman. What we are being asked to do is to see that Absolute in every form. The *sādhana* should be to look at everything through the five senses as we have been doing. Let the senses work, only let us remind ourselves that the sense-

(Continued on page 248)

# Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore— An Overview

SWAMI SURESHANANDA

*In this brief overview of the activities of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Mysore, Swami Sureshananda, the President of the Institution, focusses on the activities of the Ashrama and the public response it has received over the years. The Vidyashala and the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education are integral parts of this Ashrama which possesses some unique features that have been highlighted in this interesting and informative article.*

‘Mysore in time will be a strong hold’, wrote Swami Vivekananda from USA to Alasinga Perumal in a letter dated 21 August 1894. These were indeed prophetic words. The work being done by the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Mysore and the adjoining areas during the past 70 years and the favourable public response to it, amply testify to this fact.

Mysore appeared in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement right from its early years. Before he sailed for America, Swami Vivekananda himself visited Mysore in 1892 and was the guest of the Maharaja of Mysore. Among the many letters that Swamiji has left behind, are a few which were addressed to the Maharaja. During his short stay at Mysore, Swamiji encountered many scholars learned in Sanskrit and the scriptures, and held discussions with them. Today, a tablet commemorating such a meeting of minds stands at the Sadvidya Pathashala (one of the oldest educational institutions in this city), the place where he spoke.

Inaugurated on 11 June 1925 by Swami Siddeshwarananda, an initiated disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the Mysore Ashrama became an affiliated centre of the Ramakrishna Math in 1931. The present site was donated by the Mysore Municipality in the year 1930, at the instance of the erstwhile

Maharaja of Mysore. The Ashrama was shifted to its present premises in 1932.

A Study Circle, patronized by the Maharaja of Mysore was organized at the Mysore Ashrama in the early thirties and revived for a few years in the fifties. Its activities included regular study of scriptures under reputed scholars of Mysore for the benefit of monks who were deputed for this purpose from various centres of the Ramakrishna Order. Many of the senior monks including our Revered President Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj and others like Swamis Nikhilananda, Pavitrananda and Akhilananda studied under the auspices of this Study Circle in the early years of their monastic life. Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, one of the Vice Presidents of the Order, joined at Mysore and had his initial training for nine years here. The Mysore Study Circle was, in a way, the nucleus of the now well-established Training Centre for monastic probationers located at the Ramakrishna Math, Belur.

## *Activities of the Ashrama*

Besides running a residential school and a B.Ed. College with Moral Science as a compulsory subject, the Ashrama conducts several other activities in its own precincts on the Princes Road.

A temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna



is the pivot of the Ashrama's activities. Consecrated in 1950, the temple has a seating capacity for 300 devotees. Daily Puja and observance of the major festivals and sacred days are its regular features.

Besides running a public library and reading room housed in a large hall, and holding regular discourses, the Ashrama, as the official publication centre of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature in Kannada, brought out more than 160 titles in Kannada.

Until a few decades ago when the Mysore Ashrama became a premier publication centre, other than some stray books published by the Bangalore Ashrama on the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (*Vācāmrta*) and *Līlāprasaṅga*, and some booklets by the Mysore Ashrama itself, the vast ocean of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in English and Bengali did not find their Kannada version. With the systematic publication of the Kannada versions of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature, the Kannada speaking people obtained easy access to a mine of spiritual wealth. Swami Somanathanandaji played a key role in translating and also authoring several books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and our ancient scriptures. Late Swami Adidevanandaji too contributed to the publication by translating several Sanskrit scriptural texts into Kannada.

The Ashrama publications have won wide public recognition and appreciation. 'One of the yeoman services,' writes D.V. Gundappa, a writer of great eminence in Kannada, 'that the Ramakrishna Order has rendered to the world is the publication of its literature. Bringing out authoritative translations of the Hindu scriptures and selling them at attractive price is not an ordinary service. The Ashrama has published authentic books on the lives and message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, which read like living commentaries on the entire thought of the

sages of yore. As far as Kannada language is concerned, I can easily say that the entire Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature is available in Kannada. All that persons like me who have love for knowledge can do is to thank Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama for this stupendous achievement.' Among the independent works in Kannada, special mention must be made of the literary contribution made by Masti Venkatesh Iyengar (Jnanapeeth awardee) and Kuvempu (K.V. Puttappa, a national poet and Jnanapeeth awardee), and R.R. Diwakar.

Through the steady and active efforts of the Ashramites, devotees and well-wishers, the University of Mysore recently instituted<sup>1</sup> a 'Vivekananda Chair' to encourage and facilitate those who wish to make an in-depth study of Swamiji's message and its contemporary relevance.

In 1992, a bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda flanked by a well laid out garden on all sides was installed on the K.R.S. Road (near Akashavani, Mysore) as a result of the sincere implementation of the ideals for which Swamiji stood, by the admirers of Swamiji with the active support of the Ashrama. The Vice President of India presided over the function held to commemorate the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's Visit to Mysore in 1892, in which the statue, an important landmark in Mysore today, was unveiled.

Since the year 1984, the Ashrama has been conducting an Integrated Tribal Development Programme for the tribal villagers in the Chamaraja Nagar Taluk of Mysore District. A large sum of money was expended on extensive reforms in agriculture, sanitation, social forestry and other allied areas. Presently, the tribal welfare fund is utilized through other agencies working towards tribal welfare and also for offering scholarship to deserving tribal students.

1. See *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1997, p. 327.



### *Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala*

A major and important activity of the Mysore Ashrama is Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala (a purely residential composite junior college), located on a sprawling 68-acre plot, one and a half kilometres from the main Ashrama. This institution has earned the appreciation of many educationists and distinguished leaders who, during their visits to this place, have seen its working—Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sir M. Vishweshwaraiah, Sir Mirza Ismail, to mention a few.

The object of this institution is to give to the students an education which helps them (i) develop an integrated personality with sound mind and body, (ii) develop clean habits and discipline, and (iii) acquire a good moral and spiritual training.

Started in 1932 as a hostel for the students in various age groups, the hostel was shifted to its present premises in 1949. The newly constructed building was inaugurated in 1950 by C. Rajagopalachari, the former Governor General of India, under the presidentship of erstwhile Maharaja of Mysore in the presence of several senior monks of the Order. Swami Shambhavanandaji, the then President of Mysore Ashrama and an initiated disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji, played a key role in planning and bringing into reality the Vidyashala in its present shape.

The Vidyashala campus covers an extensive area with a stadium, twenty playgrounds for football, hockey, basketball, and other games, a gymnasium with body-building equipment housing also a wooden badminton court, a swimming pool with its own water purification plant (inaugurated in 1957 by Pandit Nehru), a dairy, a mechanized laundry, an open-air stage, and parade grounds. An eco-friendly environment exists in the lush green mini-forest pockets, artificial pond for fish and water plants, rock gardens, coconut groves, vegetable and flower beds, and orchards.

The Vidyashala is a green oasis in the heart of the bustling Mysore City. Rife with coconut and coffee plantation, and meandering tree-laden avenues, it has a wide range of flora which include about 255 identified species and a good number of bird-attracting trees. The wooded areas of the campus is a feeding and resting place for over 60 varieties of birds. This place has been drawing many students for environmental studies. The institution is housed in a four-storey building specially designed to meet all reasonable needs of the students. It consists of a spacious prayer hall, a two-tier library with computerized catalogue, a well-equipped science laboratory, class rooms, dispensary with a dental chair, ophthalmic section and a medical ward, a well-furnished auditorium, students' equipment stores, electric bakery, dormitories, a modern kitchen with steam-cooking facilities, tailoring section, a modern computer and typing section and an astronomical observatory equipped with a Compustar Celestron 14 telescope.

The Vidyashala has been maintaining a very high standard of teaching and student performance in curricular, sports and co-curricular activities. It has over 390 students at present. The entire institution is run on a no-profit-no-loss basis, and has provision to educate free of cost, meritorious students hailing from economically weaker sections. In recognition of the type of education provided here, the Government of India has also placed here a number of Merit Scholars (students hailing from socially and financially backward sections). The curriculum and pattern of examination are as prescribed by the Department of Education, Government of Karnataka.

To develop among students a spirit of dedication and respect for human values, a special course called 'retreat for character formation' is conducted for a period of three days every year for the students of class X and Pre-University Course (PUC). Abstract



ideas on character building are driven home to the youngsters with examples drawn from the lives and works of great men—both national and international. The life of a religious leader or a philosopher, a social reformer or a national leader, and the life of an eminent scientist are studied in detail, during this period. The method adopted is to deal with their lives, personality and message laying emphasis on specific traits like scientific inquiry, courage, selflessness and truthfulness. For PUC, the focus of study includes Indian Culture, Philosophy and Comparative Religion. A significant practice during the retreat period is the observance of perfect silence most of the time, which helps to ensure a congenial atmosphere for study, contemplation, meditation and self-analysis. To ensure that these retreats are effective, these are conducted in the calm and congenial atmosphere of the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education (RIMSE), located in the same campus.

Observance of festivals and organizing of sports and cultural events, besides providing opportunities for pursuing hobbies and annual excursions, are some salient features of the school.

Under the guidance of monks, teachers and other staff members, students are encouraged to manage many vital departments themselves. Annual elections are held to elect the office bearers of the Students' Council. Assisted by departmental secretaries, they manage many departments like shrine, dispensary, library, serving of food, etc. This helps the student to develop leadership qualities and the traits that are essential to work in unison as a member of a team.

In the school, much importance is given to punctuality and cleanliness. In fact, this impression implants itself in any one who visits the school. 'With all modern amenities and a host of other features, Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala is Indian to the core, rich with Indian culture, spirituality and sim-

plicity,' wrote the *Deccan Herald*, the leading daily of Bangalore.

The Vidyashala also has an active and well-organized Alumni Association which assists the institution in various ways. The old students, many of whom occupy high public offices, keep in close touch with the institution. As a part of the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Alumni Association, they recently organized, among other things, a State Level Essay Competition on the relevance of Swamiji's teaching today. To keep alive their contact and be in touch with the ideal and principles which the institution represents, the Old Boys' Association also brings out a bi-annual bulletin for private circulation called the 'Voice of Vidyashala'.

Over the years, the institution has steadily kept up its high academic and non-academic traditions. Many distinguished persons have spoken highly of the standard and style of education provided here. 'I think it is a very good school and all of your boys here are very fortunate in getting these opportunities of studying and learning and playing in this school,' remarked Pandit Nehru when he spoke to students during his visit. 'Here I see an excellent school based on Indian thought, practising the spirit of Swami Vivekananda and his great writings,' observed Dr. Raja Ramanna, the eminent scientist, and continued, 'I am glad that in this college you encourage everything that is found in Swamiji's writings and it makes me happy to see all this in actual practice.' A similar observation was made by Air Marshal K.B. Singh, Chief of Training Command, IAF, when he visited this school recently. 'This school,' he said, 'makes such a pleasant contrast, from the run-of-the-mill conventional schools, which are commercial in nature and believe in quantity rather than quality. The concepts of wholesome education in curricular, co-curricular activities and spirituality is rarely found in any of our educational institutions. The students who have passed through the portals of this tem-



ple are extremely privileged and fortunate.'

'Education is the panacea for all evils,' said Swami Vivekananda. It was his conviction that only through right education can we transform society and find lasting solution to the problems facing our country. Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala is a sincere and dedicated attempt made in the direction of translating into reality the educational vision of Swami Vivekananda.

*Sri Ramakrishna Institute of  
Moral and Spiritual Education*

Located on an elevated piece of land towards the north of the Vidyashala campus, the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education (RIMSE) is a premier educational institution conducting courses in B.Ed., a short-term course in moral education for the in-service high school teachers, and several retreats for the spiritual benefit of general public and students.

Its primary aim is to lay emphasis on the development of moral and ethical values among those students and others who enrol themselves to its courses. Value-based education is imparted here following systematic and scientific method. Envisioned and planned by Swami Shambhavanandaji, the RIMSE occupies a unique place among the educational centres run by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

The foundation of the building was laid in 1968 by Sri Morarji Desai and it was consecrated on 23 May 1974 by Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, the 10th President of the Ramakrishna Order. Later, on 21 January 1983, a 100-foot high *Gopuram* with three *kalasas* adorning it, was constructed atop the existing prayer hall.

RIMSE, as it is popularly called, has an imposing structure towering above its surroundings. It consists of a spacious prayer hall, auditorium, dining hall, class rooms and other facilities to meet the needs of students pursuing higher studies in moral and spiritual education. There are about 200 furnished single-seated rooms meant for the

students. The whole structure has a running corridor connecting the entire building.

The main entrance to the building is patterned after the Buddhist Chaitya. Walking through the entrance corridor, one reaches the prayer hall flanked by rooms and administrative offices. At the foot of the flight of steps leading to the prayer hall is a white marble statue of Swami Vivekananda in meditative posture which sanctifies the place. The marble statue of Sri Ramakrishna adorns the prayer hall which has an arched roof. Monograms of various world religions inscribed on wood fitted into niches are illustrative of religious harmony. Along the pathway outside the prayer hall, ten quotations from scriptures of major world religions inscribed on black stone tablets are affixed to the walls upon which rests the prayer hall. A flight of steps on the left corridor leads downstairs to the meditation cellar which has paintings of great spiritual luminaries of major religions. Students who wish to meditate can concentrate their minds on any of these personages.

A Theological Museum dedicated to the ideal of religious harmony is an important part of the institute. Considering the fact that worship and prayer are the noblest expressions of any religion, the museum has a number of exhibits that depict this variety in expression of the one underlying Truth. The model of a Shiva temple, a sacrificial altar of Vedic times with the tools used for performing ritualistic sacrifices, models of the Buddhist altar, the Catholic Mass, and photographs depicting the reciting of the Namaz and the Mosque are some of the exhibits.

A marble statue of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in the centre of the dining hall adds to the sublimity of the atmosphere.

Conducting spiritual retreat is a unique programme offered by the institute. In RIMSE any retreat programme features: (i) Strict observance of silence, (ii) Strict adherence to a routine, (iii) Time for introspection,



(iv) Prayer and meditation, (v) Study of scriptural books or books on India's rich spiritual and cultural tradition, (vi) Lecture classes by eminent speakers. Usually, the 'retreats' are of two or four days or of any other specified period, depending upon the background or age group of the participants.

The institute offers the following courses at present:

- (a) A ten month B.Ed. course affiliated to the University of Mysore with content-cum-methodology in Moral and Spiritual Education as a compulsory subject.
- (b) An in-service Diploma course of two months' duration in moral and spiritual education for secondary school teachers benefiting 200 teachers in four batches, in one year.
- (c) Retreats for the general public of three days' duration twice a year and Students' Retreat in groups.
- (d) Retreat programmes for Bank officers, business executives and others which are organized from time to time.
- (e) A four-week summer course in value-oriented education for the Jawahar Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers drawn from all over the country. This is being conducted under special

request made by the Government of India.

The institute has also a cultural group for boys, 'Taruna Sangha', attached to it.

RIMSE is perhaps the only institution in our country which provides formal moral and spiritual education. This training course serves only as an experiment and example. It has to be spread all over the country. RIMSE has been a pioneer in this field and has shown the way to other institutions to work deriving inspiration from this unique experiment.

### A Resume

Through its seventy years of 'silent but steady work', the Mysore Ashrama has come a long way from its humble beginnings to its present shape, fulfilling thereby Swamiji's prophesy about Mysore. Its unique educational institutions and the publication of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature in Kannada has earned for it a distinct place in the Ramakrishna Order. Though a lot more remains to be done, the Ashrama stands as an eloquent tribute to the sublime and lofty ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda—the source of its inspiration, guidance and strength. □

*Christ: Son, always entrust your cause to me, I will dispose of it well in due time. Wait for my decision and you will experience success therefrom.*

*Disciple: Lord, I willingly entrust all things to you; for my care can be of little avail. Would that I might not be too set upon future events, but could readily offer myself to your good pleasure.*

*Christ: My son, oftentimes a man eagerly pursues something which he desires; but when he has obtained it, he begins to change his mind. For our inclinations are not accustomed to endure long upon the same object, but rather we change from one thing to another. It is, therefore, a thing of great importance to abandon yourself even in little things.*

*A man's true progress consists in denying himself, and the man of self-denial is very much at liberty, and very secure. But the old enemy, who is opposed to all that is good, does not cease to tempt, but day and night lays his dangerous traps to catch the unwary into his deceitful snares.*

*'Watch and pray,' says the Lord, 'that you enter not into temptation.'*

—Thomas A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, pp. 240–1

# Emergence of Values Through Human Interactions

PROF. ASHWANI KUMAR

*The author, Prof. Ashwani Kumar of New Delhi, poses the question whether we, as human beings, can conceive and identify ourselves with such values which are life-enhancing, not outwardly but inwardly too. Tracing the evolution of human beings, he points out that the Cosmos expects us to proceed further through 'creativity' and 'holistic expansion' of human consciousness.*

All human beings seek happiness. Yet after taking recourse to the popular avenues to assumed happiness, one suddenly discovers that the goals have mostly been illusory. One finds oneself in a dilemma. Is it the intrinsic nature of happiness to be elusive?

We all seek freedom from our economic limitations, freedom from our physical and mental ailments contracted mostly through physical and social interactions. We aspire to get total freedom. Yet one discovers there is no escape from such interactions. Is the desire for total freedom a myth?

Most of the traditional religious beliefs promise both happiness and freedom through the cultivation of a detached attitude towards life. But most human minds have not evolved to such an attitude over the last three thousand years because the forces of life which have brought into being self-awareness and self-relatedness in the human psyche cannot be denied. 'Me' and 'mine' strongly colour human thinking.

Pure science, a wonderful outcome of the human evolutionary mind, has failed to grant happiness and freedom even after half a millennium because it has always allowed itself to be sold to the world-destroying forces: men, who are greedy and competitive, and use the discoveries of science to develop destructive technologies. Yet one is continually being told that it is higher technology that is always the victor in the final

reckoning. The world continues to move farther and farther on the juggernaut of soulless technology towards its own annihilation.

In such a situation, one wonders whether there is yet an untried path walking along which one can experience happiness and freedom, whether there is a mode of human interaction through such a pathway which can be continually liberating. We observe that we are sensitive beings because our universe has been working for billions of years to bring out our sensitivities. Of course, it is through human interactions with the external world that these sensitivities have become manifest.

One becomes aware that the theme is a challenge to our deeper inner selves, because, unlike beasts, we possess the capacity to delve deep into our inner selves. Our capacity to think and analyse which distinguishes us from beasts raises a set of questions about the relevance of *values in our lives*: (i) What is value?, (ii) Why we value what we value?, (iii) What is the significance of values in our interactions with the external world including other human beings?, (iv) How does a value affect the quality of our existence?, and, (v) Who is the valuer?

Many attempts have been made in the past to deal with such questions within the framework of local geographic and historic situations and levels of human perception,



and all the answers obtained appear to be relative truths only.

Perhaps evolution is the only criterion by which questions pertaining to values can be meaningfully answered. In the beginning of human evolution, we had to compete with the wild animals for our survival. So there is in us an ancient deep layer of mind which is cruel, aggressive and selfish, very unmindful of the right of other life-forms to coexist. Gradually during the next stage of evolution, we began to observe that though birds and animals loved their mate and offsprings as much as we love ours, yet the environment, birds and animals cooperated for preservation/survival. Observing this, our mental horizons began to expand and feel the participatory joys of living and the need for Truth, Beauty and Goodness in our conduct. This is the second layer of mind—very thin and fragile. Then there is a third layer of our mind which is confused because of the conflict between the first two layers. This third layer is the space into which the noble feelings of our mind are trying hard to unfold—if only we allow them to unfold after the manner of the Cosmic unfolding from matter to spirit. Truthful, beautiful and noble minds keep springing up from time to time into our midst to articulate newer meanings of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. Thus, the Enlightened One said:

There is Truth in the stone, for the stone is here. But the stone has no consciousness.

There is Truth in the plant and its life can expand; the plant grows and blossoms and bears fruit. Its beauty is marvellous, but it has very dim consciousness.

There is Truth in the animal, it moves about, perceives surroundings, it distinguishes and learns to choose, but it is not yet the consciousness of Truth. It is consciousness of the self only.

The consciousness of the self dims the

eyes of the mind—hides the Truth.

—*The Gospel of Buddha*

Our Cosmos is a wonderful, kind and benevolent laboratory. Very patiently the Cosmos designs the human body—atom after atom, cell after cell—and evolves the mind to project values which liberate our souls through participation in the evolutionary process. Perhaps it may not be out of place to recall the ecological values of Dr. Henry Skolimoski: 'Reverence for all, Ecological Justice for all, and Frugality in our life-styles', which stand firmly rooted in the participatory nature of the human mind. It is the nature of the human consciousness to be creative and to expand holistically. Now, creativity and holistic expansion of human consciousness are the terms that co-determine each other. It is through these two terms that our Cosmos expects us to proceed further. Therefore we must ask ourselves: 'Can we, as human beings, conceive and identify ourselves with such values which are life-enhancing, not only outwardly but inwardly too?' The question is multi-dimensional. In pragmatic terms we are thinking aloud:

1. Can our technology heal our Earth?
2. Can the searches of our biological sciences be directed towards the understanding of life without killing life?
3. Can our environmental studies reorient their searches through communication with birds and animals?
4. Can our social and religious institutions rooted in the divine essence of all existence lay greater emphasis on ameliorating the condition of marginalised communities, downtrodden women in particular?
5. Can our art and literature be sufficiently creative to project the newer truths of knowledge in the universe and newer visions of the beauties of human hearts?

In asking these questions, we are asking ourselves, 'Are we not what our values are?' □



# Modern Youth and Swami Vivekananda

VIJAY KASHKEDIKAR

*In this article Vijay Kashkedikar, of Nagpur, highlighting the two positive characteristics of modern youth, namely, a scientific approach to life in general and a tremendous dynamism coupled with optimism, points out that Swami Vivekananda represents the ideal of the youth and that the youth should add to their enthusiasm and scientific mentality a spirit of free inquiry and embark on a bold quest of truth. He cautions that, 'dynamism whether expressed through philanthropic activities or careerism, without the foundational discrimination between the Real and the unreal (seemingly real), and without the manifestation of the divinity within and without, assumes a form of materialistic dynamism in the garb of spirituality.'*

The significant characteristics of modern youth are (i) their welcome stress on scientific approach for everything pertaining to religion, and (ii) the tremendous dynamism coupled with optimism. Inspired by Swami Vivekananda's teachings, the dynamism in the modern youth expresses chiefly either as active and vigorous involvement in philanthropic works or as a zeal for spreading of the Swami's message along with the imparting of secular education. This is mainly implemented at the institutional level and, in a few cases, individually also. Another way of being dynamic is to participate more and more in the ever-increasing religious festivals. There is yet another way through which the dynamism of the youth is expressed. It is in the form of efforts to acquire academic knowledge of religious works and (out of subjective understanding) share this knowledge with a missionary zeal. All these expressions of dynamism are rightly regarded by the youth as spiritual activities.

However, in spite of these earnest efforts, no significant impact of these preachings is seen on the society as a whole. As a result, the dynamic efforts of the youth though sincere to the core are sometimes marked by an underlying feeling of distress,

frustration and a general feeling of unfulfilment. This lack of impact on the society means that there is some basic lacuna in our grasp of Swamiji's teachings. That is the reason why there is a discrepancy between Swamiji's mandate and the life lived by us. To trace out this basic shortcoming, we will have to meditate repeatedly on the life and message of Swami Vivekananda.

The relevance of his teachings in shaping the life of today's youth can well be understood by dwelling on the spiritual moods behind every event and action of his life rather than the events and actions themselves. Influenced by the education of his times, Swamiji himself did not believe in anything because someone said so or because it was so written in the books. He believed only in reason (*yukti*) and personal verification (*sva-anubhūti*). Real scientific approach underlines a spirit of 'free enquiry' and a bold quest of truth. Experimentation, direct perception, test, demonstration, broad comprehensive generalizations, and critical verification are its other essential requisites.

All these requisites were seen manifest in Swamiji's life and that too in a very natural way. His student life was characterized



by a free inquiry regarding the ultimate truth (of which he had had a glimpse in childhood) and by a mastery over all philosophies, Eastern and Western. When his pursuit to find a final solution through books proved futile, he made a bold and independent quest of truth. His search for a living ideal of religion ultimately led him to Sri Ramakrishna. Then began his own struggle for the direct perception of the ultimate truth. After intense sadhana, young Narendranath attained to the state of absolute fulfilment, i.e. 'Self-realization', in Nirvikalpa Samadhi. After his personal experience of the divine reality within, he made a broad comprehensive generalization and trumpeted in the clear voice of Vedanta—the voice of freedom: 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.'<sup>1</sup> Thus he has showed that a scientific approach leads to the unfoldment of the 'Reality' within and brings total and lasting fulfilment. But that urge for the truth must be earnest and sincere. Does it mean then that the modern youth is not taking a scientific approach? Or, that their urge is not keen?

A close scrutiny reveals that instead of cultivating a spirit of free inquiry and embarking on a bold quest of truth as Swamiji had done, modern youth is overwhelmingly impressed by the technological achievements of the day. Fully engrossed in these achievements, the youth has lost the faculty of discrimination between the 'Real' and what is seemingly real (*nityānitya viveka*). He has succumbed to a craze for more and more worldly comforts or to use the precise word, 'careerism for more'. As the desire for more is never fulfilled, though sublimated in some noble exceptions, there is a general

feeling of unfulfilment.

Thus, the dynamism whether expressed through philanthropic activities or careerism, without the foundational discrimination between the Real and the unreal (seemingly real), and without the manifestation of the divinity within and without, assumes a form of materialistic dynamism in the garb of spirituality. Swamiji never preached this type of dynamism. What Swamiji preached is spiritual dynamism coupled with material welfare through toned down science and technology. Showing its limitations, he asked us not to be swept away by the glittering technological achievements. He asked us to culture the consciousness of the divinity within for spiritual evolution leading to absolute fulfilment. This transformation from a life of unfulfilment to absolute fulfilment is to be made in this modern world of science and technology where space and time have narrowed owing to faster communication. How this is to be achieved is evident from the second part of his message.

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.<sup>2</sup>

So freedom, i.e. 'Self-realization', is the only goal of life and Swamiji asks the youth to be dynamic with this end in view. Modern youth is no doubt dynamic in all the walks of life. But the pertinent need is to spiritualize this dynamism. This is to be done by cultivating the awareness of the divinity within, whose energy (*shakti*) expresses itself as dynamism. For this an identification with the spiritual eagerness seen in the life of Swamiji as a youth, is necessary. We will have to imbibe his urge for the ultimate truth coupled with his scientific approach of utilizing the four human faculties as explained

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 1, p. 124. [Hereafter C.W.]

2. C.W., vol. 1, p. 124.

above, to attain life's consummation. Based on his experiences in youth, he declared as a yugacharya, 'Believe not because an old manuscript has been produced, because it has been handed down to you from your forefathers, because your friends want you to—but think for yourself; search truth for yourself; realize it yourself.'<sup>3</sup>

This is his message for the youth. He has shown the way for reaching the goal of

3. C.W., vol. 8, p. 104.

human life through his own life. Two phases are striking. One phase is that of an aspirant, a seeker after truth. The other is that of a man of Self-realization, as the world teacher, leading others towards that goal. Both these phases were manifested in a single personality. It is for the modern youths to identify themselves with these two phases of Swamiji's life in sequence and mould their own personality by first transforming materialistic dynamism to spiritual dynamism and secondly by fulfilling his mandate, 'BE AND MAKE'. □

## Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad

(Continued from page 237)

objects are not related to us and though they be many, they are yet one. We as *sādhakas* should avoid the mistake of negating common sense-perception; instead, we should through reasoning see oneness. There is no harm in this kind of self-education, which only calls for a little alertness, awareness, perseverance to put the mind on the right track—that all is God.

Let us educate ourselves to be aware without break that Atman alone abides. This is the way to attain the vision of oneness of the universe, *sarvam khalvidam brahma*. This effort is *sādhana*.

The teacher admonishes the student not to busy himself with all sorts of confused thinking, to shed all ideas contrary to this idea of oneness, and to avoid whatever takes

him away from his awareness of oneness. He is to concentrate only on the oneness of Atman or Brahman and give up every other 'word' — the *aparā-vidya-viśayas* — which take him away from the consciousness of the divine. He is to get rid of all contrary ideas created by not admitting the existence of Reality behind the apparent world. Why should he do so? Because, God is testing his perseverance, patience, devotion, dedication and faith by playing this game with him. This *sādhana* is the *setu* (bridge) by which the *jīvātmā* will reach the goal. The bridge (methodology) connects what he is today with what he wants to be tomorrow—the deathless, immortal Atman. That is the purpose of religion—to manifest the divinity already within us.

(to be continued)

He who interrupts the course of his spiritual exercises and prayer is like a man who allows a bird to escape from his hand; he can hardly catch it again.

—St. John of the Cross



# The VOICE of the Voice or The Eloquence of Swami Vivekananda (A Rhetorical Appraisal)

PROF. B.N. SIKDAR

*Professor B.N. Sikdar is not new to the readers of Prabuddha Bharata. The speeches, letters, conversations, and writings—prose and poetry—of Swami Vivekananda, have been viewed by learned men and women in various ways. Spiritual aspirants have looked for spiritual insight and sustenance in these works. Men of literature have studied the same works or parts thereof in the light of their special training. The learned author, in this article, makes a study of the works of Swamiji to bring out the elements of rhetoric in them. We must not forget that Swamiji called himself, 'a voice without a form', and his hearers felt a spiritual uplift hearing him; perhaps, there was much to hear too, at least for those unfortunate among his hearers who could not go beyond their sense perceptions. He did not make gestures with his hands, and preferred to walk to and fro on the stage resting in his own Self as he delivered his message.*

*In traditional rhetoric, the speaker is usually concerned with three matters: (1) the art of rhetoric, (2) the speech itself, and (3) the situation that calls it forth. The 'art of rhetoric' includes: (a) collecting the material (called invention), (b) arranging it (disposition), (c) putting it into words (style), (d) memorizing it, and (e) finally delivering it. Among the three-fold aims of rhetoric, namely, to instruct, to move, and to delight, it is style that contributes almost exclusively. The chief virtues of style are four-fold: (i) correctness, (ii) clarity, (iii) elegance, and (iv) appropriateness. Ancient rhetoric was also much concerned with the rhythm of speeches, the order of words and the length and cohesion of sentences.*

*The 'speech' itself has five components: (a) an introduction (to gain the goodwill of the hearers), (b) a statement of the point at issue, (c) arguments to prove it, (d) refutation of contrary arguments, and (e) a conclusion. By 'the situation that calls it forth' is meant whether the discussion is general or particular, and whether it is a show of speech (called demonstrative), political (called deliberative) or legal.*

*There were ups and downs in rhetoric. Gradually rhetoric fell into discredit. The nineteenth century condemned all traditional techniques of style and all organized rhetorical study. The antiquity's interest in rhetoric was even described as a 'monstrous aberration'. However, in 1930s, logical positivism drew attention to the importance of studying how language is used and in 1941 I.A. Richards, in his Philosophy of Rhetoric, emphasized the need for a new art of discourse.*

## I

Over one hundred years ago, in a nook of rural Bengal (beside the southern channel of the Ganga, also called Bhagirati or Hooghly) a voice spoke in a peculiar timbre and intonation. It came from the lips of an almost illiterate village priest who often

went about scantily dressed, ecstatic, and was unorthodox in his methods of worship in the eyes of the temple officials. Like the prophet of the Old Testament, he abused shallowness, pride, luxury, artfulness, worldliness and cruelty. There was a religious foundation to his socio-ethical teach-

ings. Behind him lay centuries of ancient Indian religious thought and his realization. In the ears of the few devotees around him he constantly harped the need of catering to the needs of all living beings. His personal goddess was *Kali* or *Shakti*, but he had gone into the heart of world's major religious faiths and perceived that all religions were at bottom the same. And he said so.

This voice was feeble though forceful, and had a rural tang in it. Now and then he seemed to hear his Goddess speak to him. When in ecstasy he talked to Her, pleaded with Her, like a baby with its mother for her love. That voice, circumscribed as it was by circumstances (into which we need not go for our present purpose), could not be heard far and wide. 'No saint, or hero can altogether carve out his own course.' Sri Ramakrishna who spoke in his 'private idiom' knew his physical limitations.

However, he was also aware that another being blessed by God would come to him, whose voice propelled by God's power and his, would catch the ear and open the hearts of thousands through the ages. That blessed being would say to him Isaiah-fashion<sup>1</sup>: 'Here am I', and Ramakrishna would give him the mandate to go abroad and broadcast his message. The younger voice ('not so great but much greater') was Mother India's choice to explain, to propagate ancient India's wisdom, East and West. In him Nature specially designed a preacher, an interpreter, and gave him a physical voice bronze-bell like, well-modulated; a warm voice, a captivating timbre. However, in the U.S.A. and in England he had to speak in English which he knew well enough, though it was not the language used by his forefathers to express religious ideas. His inborn oratorical instincts enabled him to adapt 'the standard English voice' of the nineteenth

century to express his own religious views, so well that the media felt compelled to blitz its excellence<sup>2</sup>.

Vivekananda's first speech at the first Parliament of World Religions at Chicago was not a grand finale; it was just the beginning: the trial flight of an eaglet which had just left its perch. There is little track record of how his voice sounded before that august audience. Thereafter, the voice went on spewing a molten lava flood of words and phrases like an active volcano from hall to hall, city to city. On most occasions Vivekananda spoke extempore and yet was never at a loss for an appealingly beautiful and apt expression, or a noble idea. The texts of his addresses as they appear on the printed page yields to rhetorical (in its good sense) analysis and reveals his individual style of oral delivery (as distinct from machine delivery of our days). This voice was essentially an echo of the older voice.

Delivery is of necessity conditioned by the speaker's choice of language, his manner of thinking and feeling. An effective orator is he who prepares either on paper (i.e., set speeches) or mentally (i.e., those delivered on the spur of the moment as he is going on). He chooses his language and seems to drive home his ideas by appropriate gestures as well as rhythms of diction. (More or less we do so even in ordinary conversation.) This psycho-rhetorical truth is the ground of the popular saying *le style est e' homme* ('the style is the man himself'). Critics regard a person's style as individual, and hence identifiable. T.S. Eliot drew attention to Dante's 'precision in the use of words, an eye for

1. *Isaiah*, Ch. VI.

2. See 'Reports of Vivekananda's first speeches in America', *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 3, pp. 471, 473, 475—'An orator by divine right').



particulars, severity and depth of vocal tone'.<sup>3</sup> The style being the man himself, every writer or artist or speaker must leave a part of himself in his work. Vivekananda was a character longer than life, romantic, sentimental, yet deep and virile, also generous (from all accounts left by those who had come into contact with him). The same speaker/writer would try to express in different tones when addressing audiences of different calibre/character; the subject-matter, the racial characteristics of the listeners, their cultural background, the family tradition and the intellectual level are also relevant factors. Hence it is that we hear Vivekananda firing salvos on the hopeless rottenness of Hindu custom of untouchability at Ramnad, Rameswaram, Manmadura and elsewhere in Southern India on his return from the West. The timbre in these orations strikes up stirring tremolos, so to say.

## II

If we take 'Inspired Talks' and 'Interviews' into account as well as those speeches which have come down as mere notes,<sup>4</sup> we could say on a rough estimate that Vivekananda threw out not less than three quarters of a million words—an enormous amount for one who simultaneously planned/executed other activities of perennial fruitfulness, and who was not allowed by Providence more than half a dozen years of active life (1894–1900; the dozen and a half months of 1901–1902 saw the sun pink and sinking slowly). Living intensively and intently, the voice spoke on propelled by the volition of the 'older voice' and these words have come to us reverberating down the ages.

3. *The Swanee Review*, Special Annual Number, Winter 1952.

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989 in eight volumes; 1997 ninth volume). [Hereafter, C.W.]

Never before his arrival in Boston had 'the Hindu Monk' in life addressed thousands or even dozens of white men and women in their own tongue as he did that September afternoon in the Hall of Columbus. Earlier he had spoken only to small gatherings in gardens, under porticos, and spreading trees. The local newspapers relegated reports of these informal talks to 'Personal Columns'. This they did without any mention of his oratorical skill. They were yet to take him seriously, he was then no more than a curious arrival from another 'planet' to gaze at. Then the thunderer shoots his bolt.

Among the audience were intellectuals, theologians, philosophers, professors of religion, and the labouring men and women from the huge mills which had made the town and its suburbs prosperous. In spite of the Parliament's watch-words of 'Tolerance and Fraternity', some of the Churches represented had anticipated (and correctly) controversy. The speakers sent in by them were highly skilled in debate and discourse. Some of them too received ovation (e.g. Pung Kwang Yu, H. Dharmapala of Ceylon who read out a prepared speech, Rev. B.F. Kidder, Isaac M. Wise). The Hindu monk had dropped in on the Congress at the eleventh hour, and quite unprepared, and that 'kept me very busy for some time...'. He was afraid to speak but 'the Lord gave me strength'.<sup>5</sup> In retrospect, the scene well known and widely commented on, might seem absurd, but it happened just as Vivekananda drew it.

Perhaps one point alone would be enough to seize the importance of the linguistic analysis of the speeches. Sentences in the concluding paragraphs of his address in the Hall of Columbus beginning with 'The

5. C.W., vol. VII, p. 453; letter No. X, dated 2 October 1893 at Chicago.



present convention, which is one of...’ use the present and future perfect of the word *to be*; it is as if the speaker has left the present and passed to the future: ‘But their time *is come*; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention *may be* the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons *wending* their way to the same goal.’ Swamiji’s vision crossed the limits of the Hall, of seas and hills, and ages. He was looking at a vision far off, having undertaken in a flash of wisdom a symbolical or a physical or, to borrow a word from rhetoric, a figurative journey.

Scores of instances may be cited from Swamiji’s books and lectures of such use of sounds, emphases and varied onomatopoeic<sup>6</sup> devices but we have to be content with three in each case on account of space constraint.

Even an uninitiated reader will not have difficulty in hearing in his mind’s ear how the following sounded when the speaker spouted question on question: ‘Whose fault is it? ...Why should these poor wretches starve...? ...What did we do for these people...? Why should they...? ...what did we do for them before? ...have we taken hold of the torch of truth, and if so, how far did we carry it?’<sup>7</sup> Whose? What? Why? How far? Such an accumulation of interrogatives was meant to shock, to send jolts through the air waves. His country men were cowardly. They were slaves deluded by outmoded customs and beliefs. These

outbursts are gut-reactions, full of contempt for the rich, the luxurious and the lazy. They are Vivekananda’s ‘philippics’<sup>8</sup>. For the sake of critical honesty, it must be observed that the rhetorical quality of some of the lectures grouped under ‘Lectures from Colombo to Almora’ (vol. 3) is not so high as the quality of say, ‘Christ, the Messenger’ (vol. 4), or ‘Discipleship’ (vol. 8). The element of anger or even annoyance where they exist in poetry, prose or play, is a hindrance to excellence. Eloquence and anger do not mix like oil and vinegar in the same vessel. Soon Vivekananda grows less flamboyant and breathes easier (‘The Religion We Are Born In’, delivered at Dacca, 31 March 1901. See vol. 3).

Of these orations in English, a hundred were delivered during Vivekananda’s sojourn in the West (1893–1896 with some breaks, and 1900).

### III

Before his departure for Chicago, the young monk had travelled India widely from the Himalayas to the land’s end in Indian Ocean in a mendicant’s garb. With a pilgrim’s staff in hand and a bowl clutched in fingers, he trudged through towns and villages, through forests and deserts, by lakes, across rivers, depending absolutely on chance for food and shelter (he struck a south-westerly course because in this region were concentrated races and communities of diverse cultures).

Occasionally he was welcomed to a palace, but for the most part he stayed in the slums on the wayside for rest. What he saw of nature and of men and women remained etched in his unerasable memory with the sharpness of a Picasso. In his orations we may mark, ever and anon, the traces of the

6. ‘Onomatopoeia’ is the formation of a word, a *cuckoo* or *boom*, by imitating the sound made by or associated with its referent. ‘Onomatopoeic’ or ‘onomatopoeic’ is its adjectival form.—Ed.

7. C.W., vol. 3, p. 166. See also ‘My Plan of Campaign’, vol. 3, p. 207.

8. Any speech or discourse of bitter denunciation.—Ed.



sights and sounds which had excited his passion or arrested his attention, as also the deep and unequivocal traces of employment in which he saw that the people engaged. The images are, oftener than not, drawn from experiences of a kind that came home immediately to the audience. This is equally true of experiences gathered during his tour in the West; those pictures surface and act as an aid to the exposition of his ideas. In illustration, or example, or comparison, consider:

Just as in a lake, various strata of ice of various degrees of solidity are formed, or as in an ocean of vapour there are various degrees of density, so is this universe an ocean of matter.<sup>9</sup>

While speaking on Bhakti Yoga, he says:

The seed must be a living seed, and the field must be ready ploughed; and when both these conditions are fulfilled, a wonderful growth of genuine religion takes place.<sup>10</sup>

The 'seed' here comes not from 'the parable of the sower' alone; it is also from the seasonal occupation of the Indian peasant—both kinds fused and given a fresh form.

The lovely picturesqueness that is frequently present in Vivekananda's orations comes from his ever observant eye, keen ear and a sharply alert mind. He saw it all as a young man standing in summer twilight, under the stars, with his eyes ashine at the glorious life around him. Just in one part of a paragraph of 'Christ, the Messenger', there is a concentration of oriental imageries: 'of the bright sky, of the heat, of the sun, of the desert, of the thirsty men and animals; of

men and women coming with pitchers on their heads to fill them at the wells; of the flocks, of the ploughmen, of the cultivation that is going on around; of the water-mill and wheel, of the mill-pond, of the mill-stones.'<sup>11</sup> We come across examples such as the spider weaving webs, ripples on the surface of water, the Himalayan breeze as well as the snows, the sun reflecting itself into a million suns in globules of water, the torrents and deluges, the glass-like lake, forests and a hundred other natural sights and sounds. However, the ugliness of the scenes did not escape him either: the widow's tears, the stark nakedness of slum children; the howling jackals are also in the speeches grouped under the title, 'Lectures From Colombo to Almora'. Week after week, month after month, he stayed amidst these scenes with his mind on an ingenious vision of an improved world to come. 'The longest night seems to be passing away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at last, the seeming corpse appears to be awaking and a voice is coming to us...'<sup>12</sup> Two thousand years ago another voice had cried in the wilderness and died a martyr. The high heroic colouring of parts of his *corpus* belongs to the attitudes assumed by him in respect of the social iniquity and moral degradation. He knew that an original 'goodness' glows through all creation; moreover, he knew that man's greed for money and power dishonours that goodness and besmirches and violates its effects. Living intensely and intently, he was moved by some force which he had no desire to question. Flames do not ask: *why burn upward?*

#### IV

'Displaced by destiny the hero came to the Lavinian shores'—is the line with which Virgil opens his *Aeneid*. While assessing Vivekananda as an orator, we should not

9. C.W., vol. 2, p. 31; to a Californian audience.

10. C.W., vol. 3, p. 46.

11. C.W., vol. 4, p. 142.

12. C.W., vol. 3, p. 145.



overlook the role of the audience in the Hall of Columbus and in various cities. The Americans attending must be given their due share in the glory of it all. In the domain of public speaking the hearer's part is so important that Aristotle draws the attention of his pupils to the manner in which different age groups are to be tackled.<sup>13</sup> The seeds of Ramakrishna's utterances and of the Vedanta scattered by Vivekananda did not fall on stony ground. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the land of Patrick Henry, of Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and the noblest of them all—Abraham Lincoln—had evolved a political frame-work (and it is still evolving) which made dissent possible: public opinion was already enlightened and efficient. Ingersoll once told the Hindu monk that had he spoken of Christianity in his critical manner fifty years before, then he would have been hanged or been burnt alive or would have been stoned out of the villages.<sup>14</sup> Orators, free thinkers, preachers had been addressing people on various issues, some of them momentous (e.g. anglicanism, slavery) and roused the national understanding by constant appeals to their sobriety, judgement and reason. In those days, information, controversy, political opinion, philosophical speculation were transmitted not over radio or television. It was still the age of the spoken word in public square, pulpit and theatre. An orator could fully exert his personal charm and mastery of the craft of delivery to drive his point home. The intonations, the gestures, the facial expressions played their part in an orator's persuasive capability.

Of the American citizens' treatment of him Vivekananda has written home again and again: 'And how to speak of their kindness? I have no more wants now...'<sup>15</sup> The power and grit of his hearers im-

pressed him.<sup>16</sup> They were a people who prayed to the tune of 'A Mighty fortress is, our God' and 'Away in a manger'; they listened to the studious Rabbi, to John Chrysostom, 'the golden-mouthed preacher of Antioch', to the Presbyterian John Knox, and more often to the backwoods preacher. Vivekananda could win his case so quickly because he had such a jury to judge him.

In their turn, the audience of free thinkers were attracted by his graceful person, lustrous eyes, bronze-bell voice, and shining virtues, his stocky figure and tough-looking demeanour. His 'general bearing' commented *Appeal-Avalanche*, 'ranks him with the most cultured people of Western etiquette and custom.'<sup>17</sup> Quintilian, the author of a classic work on rhetoric, *Institutio Oratoria* ('The Training of an Orator'; end of AD 1), states that to be a successful orator one must leave an ethical impress on all that one said. All that the young monk told his western audience, the way he treated men as well as women when they met him for informal chats, his deportment, his sincerity, enthusiasm and candour, revealed to the American eye and mind one extraordinary human soul with a tremendous intellectual drive.

Mark Twain described a Yankee as unlearned, with 'neither the refinement nor the weakness of a college education; but quick-witted and completely, even devastatingly, successful'<sup>18</sup> He was right at least partially. The Yankee had enough 'wit' to detect the element in ancient, mature culture of India and to appropriate the philosophico-scientific approach made to theological problems by Vivekananda. Swamiji cultured the 'uneducated' Yankee by his ability to make his ideas immediately intelligible and memorable to him. His natural gift for illustration

16. C.W., vol. 6, p. 272.

17. C.W., vol. 3, p. 484; *Appeal-Avalanche* dated 16 January 1894.

18. *The Connecticut Yankee*.

13. *Rhetoric*, 2:12:16.

14. C.W., vol. 2, p. 27.

15. C.W., vol. 5, p. 21.



and comparison, occasionally ingenious, and sometimes calculated to disturb the equanimity, use of language (which is in a special sense 'verbal behaviour'), never failed to arrest attention.

## V

Descendants of Scandinavia and other migrants from continental Europe, including the Jews, the Americans were (and still are) a virile race. They had the flexibility that comes from an unrivalled power of assimilation. Through all the influences and agencies from without, in speech and poetry alike, the stock persists: they were no longer French, or Italian or Spanish, but American. So, they readily accepted Vivekananda, through whose speech runs a splendidly robust and virile note much after their heart. While seeking to touch their heart or delight their sense, Swamiji did not leave their brain idle:

The tender plant of spirituality will die if exposed too early to the action of a constant change of ideas and ideals. Many people, in the name of what may be called religious liberalism, may be seen feeding their idle curiosity with a continuous succession of different ideals. With them, hearing new things grows into a kind of disease, a sort of religious drink-mania.<sup>19</sup>

His argument throughout the Yoga lectures is calm, methodical, confident, and he speaks with a balanced ease and reassuring reasonableness, using religious jargon sparingly; he also thinks up and answers possible objections: 'America is the best field in the world to carry on my idea; so I do not think of leaving America soon.'<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere we have three comments on the men and women who loved to hear him: 'There is a curiosity in this nation, such as you meet with nowhere else. They want to know

everything, and their women—they are the most advanced in the world. The average American woman is far more cultivated than the average American man. The men slave all their life for money, and the women snatch every opportunity to improve themselves.'<sup>21</sup> Such a people could hardly be deluded by false glitter; nothing but gold could satisfy them. While leaving Queen Dido for Italy, Aeneas pleads the command of gods and oracles.<sup>22</sup> Some such high destiny must have decided Vivekananda's embarkation for Chicago.

Oratory was not Vivekananda's vocation; he was driven to the job not to win plaudits for eloquence. He was driven to it by circumstances as well as by the desire for decisive action: 'I travelled twelve years all over India, finding no way to work for my countrymen, and that is why I went to America.'<sup>23</sup> The new continent did not ultimately disappoint him. It gave him money (of which he was sorely in need) and also fame. To achieve fame as an orator he had first to overcome certain difficulties inherent in the situation. He tackled these with the instinct of a born orator.

Chatham, Younger Pitt, Edmund Burke, Gladstone, Macaulay and others of the golden age of eloquence in England used to speak to an assembly that had among the members a few enlightened enough not to be swept off by bombast or to fail to judge the issue on its merit by analysis. Vivekananda was less fortunate in this regard. Those who came to hear him at that point of time in Midwest or East Coast knew nothing of the ancient philosophy he was talking of, nor of arts/sciences. To them the wisdom of history was a sealed store. Barring a few intellectuals the hustlings were, to begin

19. C.W., vol. 3, p. 63.

20. C.W., vol. 8, p. 313; letter to a disciple in Madras dated 28 June 1894.

21. C.W., vol. 5, p. 22; see also letter No. VII, C.W., vol. 5, p. 28.

22. *Aeneas*, Book III.

23. C.W., vol. 3, p. 226.



with, rather driven by curiosity than concern for spiritual illumination; popular 'entertainment' then included them listening to sermons. Thirdly, while speaking in India he could freely refer to the epics, the Puranas, or the widely current anecdotes in order to illustrate a truth, amplify a point or drive an idea home. In the West he had to labour under a constraint. The only book widely familiar there was the *Book of Common Prayer*. Hence, we find that Swamiji frequently adopts the words and phraseology of that holy book: (a) 'He also, like Jesus, came to fulfil and not to destroy.'<sup>24</sup> (b) 'He is here in the heart of our hearts.'<sup>25</sup> (c) 'He is the eye of our eyes, the life of our life, the mind of our mind, the soul of our soul.'<sup>26</sup> (d) 'You hear fanatics glibly saying, "I do not hate the sinner. I hate the sin," but I am prepared to go any distance to see the face of that man who can really make a distinction between the sin and the sinner.'<sup>27</sup> (e) 'This is the kernel of truth within the story of Adam's fall in the Jewish scripture.'<sup>28</sup> These adoptions are a few of the most apparent; there are others more difficult to detect, e.g., 'The hand was made to give always.'<sup>29</sup> 'Tears and laughter are near kin.'<sup>30</sup> 'It is nearly always the barbarian race that conquers.'<sup>31</sup> 'Man dies but once'<sup>32</sup> 'Light, bring light!'<sup>33</sup>

## VI

In orations delivered in cities like New York, Washington, London or Paris, Vivekananda could go to Shakespeare, Milton, the Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century, to Charles Dickens or Matthew Arnold.

His oft-quoted words—'Awake, arise and stop not till the goal is reached' echo Milton's Satan speaking in hell; Matthew Arnold's 'Quiet-work' is used in 'Does not nature do a million times more than that every moment?'<sup>34</sup> 'The preaching of sermons by brooks and stones may be true as a poetical figure...'<sup>35</sup> takes us to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*; the ring of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* sounds in 'They worship Me best who worship My worshippers.'<sup>36</sup> The Holy Bible and Shakespeare's works are two sources which supplied him the largest number of words, phrases, and quotations. 'The fisherman must use every possible device to catch fish; and there are some that cannot be taken with hook and line but must be groped for and be tickled.'<sup>37</sup> The American in the last decade of the nineteenth century was a hungry feeder.

There was a fourth hurdle on the road to success. The avocations of life of the masses whom Vivekananda was addressing their culture, thought process, and outlook were entirely different from those of Indians. The country was then dominating the world politically and economically as a colonial power. Vivekananda's auditors were by temperament highly possessive. They clung to their customs and conventions tenaciously. They loved their country, their religion, their way of life. Fired by the ideals of a great revolution on the other side of the Atlantic, their ancestors had wrought one nearer home through a civil war. The bases of their life were anchored on solid realities. To speak to such a group of the airy truths of the Vedanta which says that the universe (according to one interpretation) is an illusion, to hold their attention and convince them, was indeed a formidable task.

(to be continued)

24. C.W., vol. 1, p. 21.

25. C.W., vol. 1, p. 381.

26. C.W., vol. 6, p. 52.

27. C.W., vol. 1, p. 80.

28. C.W., vol. 2, p. 72.

29. C.W., vol. 4, p. 10.

30. C.W., vol. 4, p. 11.

31. C.W., vol. 4, p. 13.

32. C.W., vol. 5, p. 87.

33. C.W., vol. 3, p. 247.

34. C.W., vol. 4, p. 155.

35. C.W., vol. 4, p. 27.

36. C.W., vol. 4, p. 175.

37. *The Pilgrim's Progress*.



# Swami Brahmananda

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

*(Continued from the December 1997 issue)*

## As a Guru

The *Guru Gita* explains the word *guru*: *gu* means 'darkness or ignorance'; *ru* means 'destroyer.' He or she who destroys or removes the ignorance of the disciple is a guru. Brahmananda was a real guru. He had the power to impart samadhi, or illumination, to anybody. Once Boshi Sen, a young devotee, said to Brahmananda, 'Maharaj, you are miserly.' 'Why do you say so?' asked the swami. 'Because you have the power to give the experience of God to others, but you are withholding it.' Maharaj gravely said, 'Who wants God?'

After becoming president of the Ramakrishna Order, Brahmananda began to initiate people, but was very selective. He strongly believed that the disciple and the guru must know and evaluate each other before initiation. Sometimes people had to wait many years before receiving initiation from him. There were three known reasons that prevented him from initiating indiscriminately. First, he followed the injunction of the scriptures, 'Don't make too many disciples.' Second, he remembered what the Master had said to Keshab Sen: 'Why don't you study their nature? Is there any good in making anybody and everybody a disciple?' Third, many times after giving initiation he would become ill, as he had absorbed the disciples' sins.

However, Holy Mother asked Brahmananda to give initiation to more people, since she could not handle alone all the aspiring devotees. In 1916 Maharaj went to the Minerva Theatre to see a drama about

Ramanuja, the exponent of qualified nondualistic Vedanta. The play portrayed how after Ramanuja's initiation, his guru told him that whoever repeated the mantram would be liberated, but were he to divulge it to anyone, he himself would go to hell. The large-hearted Ramanuja immediately went to a crowded place and shouted: 'I have just received a mantram from my teacher, and whoever repeats this will attain liberation. Here it is, take it!' This particular scene moved Maharaj and he shed tears. From then on he became more liberal in giving initiation.

Brahmananda's spiritual instructions are simple, direct, and practical. He taught mostly from his own experience rather than by quoting from the scriptures. Swami Vishuddhananda recalled: 'On one occasion, in the house of Balaram Basu, Maharaj said: "You practise meditation and japam; you progress a little, then comes a period of dryness. It seems that the doors are entirely closed. At that time it is necessary that you stick to your spiritual practices with infinite patience; by so doing you will find one day that all of a sudden the doors are opened. What a great joy it is then! In spiritual life many such thresholds have to be crossed."

'Once Maharaj said to a devotee: "When you meditate, you should imagine that God is standing before you like the mythical wish-fulfilling tree." Another day he said to the same devotee: "At the time of meditation you should imagine that you are in mid-ocean; on all sides there are mountain-high waves, and God is standing before

you ready to help you." In Madras, while I accompanied him on a walk, Maharaj said to me, "Just do one thing: always try to remember God. I also do that."

Girish Chandra Ghosh, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, told the following story about Brahmananda's extraordinary spiritual power:

Compared to myself, Rakhal is only a young boy. I know that the Master regarded him as his spiritual son, but that is not the only reason I respect him. Once I was suffering from asthma and various kinds of ailments. As a result, my body became very weak and I lost faith in Sri Ramakrishna. With a view to getting rid of that dry spell, I engaged pandits to read the Gita and the Chandi to me. But still I had no peace of mind. Some brother disciples came to see me, and I told them about the unhappy state of my mind, but they only kept silent. Then one day Rakhal came and asked me, 'How are you?' I replied: 'Brother, I am in hell. Can you tell me the way out?' Rakhal listened to me and then burst into laughter. 'Why worry about it?' said he. 'As the waves of the ocean rise high, then go down again, and again rise, so does the mind. Don't be upset. Your present mood is due to the fact that it will lead you to a higher realm of spirituality. The wave of the mind is gathering strength.' As soon as Rakhal left my house, my doubt and dryness disappeared and I got back my faith and devotion.

There is not much glory in making a good man better. Once Brahmananda said to a monk, 'If you can't make a bad man good, why did you become a monk?' Maharaj was a friend and saviour of the fallen, the dejected, and the lowly. When Ramakrishna was alive, Girish had taken many actors and actresses from his theatre to the

Master for blessings. Later they would visit Holy Mother and Brahmananda. (At that time actresses were not accepted by society because, for the most part, they were prostitutes.) Tara, one of Girish's actresses, wrote in her memoirs how Brahmananda's love and blessings changed her life:

Ever since I was a little girl I worked on the stage with Girish Chandra Ghosh and heard from him about Sri Ramakrishna. There was a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna in every theatre with which Girish Babu was connected, and the actors and actresses used to bow down to the Master's photograph before they appeared on the stage....

My first visit to Belur Math took place about six years ago [1916]. I was then depressed and restless. Life seemed unbearable to me. I began to seek out places of pilgrimage. In this unhappy state of mind I finally went to Belur Math. Binodini, the finest actress of Bengal at the time, was with me. When I was seven years old she introduced me to the theatre, and again it was she who introduced me to the monastery.

It was past noon when we came to the Math. Maharaj had finished his lunch and was about to go to his room to rest. At that moment we arrived and prostrated before him.

Maharaj said: 'Hello, Binode! Hello, Tara! So you have come! You are too late. We have already finished our lunch. You should have let us know that you were coming.'

We could see how worried he was about us. He immediately ordered fruit prasad, and arrangements were made to fry luchis for us. We went first to the shrine, then had our prasad, and afterwards were shown around the Math by a swami. Maharaj did not have his rest that day.

We were brought up to revere holy



men. But along with respect and faith I felt much fear of them. I was impure — a fallen woman. And so when I touched the holy feet of Maharaj, I did it with great hesitancy, afraid to offend him. But his sweet words, his solicitude and love dispelled all my fear.

Maharaj asked me, 'Why don't you come here often?' I replied, 'I was afraid to come to the Math.' Maharaj said with great earnestness: 'Fear? You are coming to Sri Ramakrishna. What fear can there be? All of us are his children. Don't be afraid! Whenever you wish, come here. Daughter, the Lord does not care about externals. He sees our inmost heart. There should be no fear in approaching him.'

I could not hold back my tears. My lifelong sorrow melted as the tears fell from my eyes, and I realized: Here is my refuge. Here is someone to whom I am not a sinner, I am not an outcast.

Once in Dhaka, Premananda said to Brahmananda, 'Swamiji was a saviour of the lowly and redeemer of the sinners.' Brahmananda immediately replied: 'I am also a saviour of the lowly and a redeemer of the sinners.' Tabu (Matiswar Sen), a young devotee, used to visit Maharaj every day at Balaram's house and would give personal service to him. Unfortunately, one day he committed an immoral act (probably adultery), and Maharaj heard about it. Tabu was ashamed to show his face. One day he secretly came to meet some of his friends, but he accidentally encountered Maharaj. Affectionately Maharaj asked Tabu, 'Have you seen the big horns of a buffalo?' 'Yes, Maharaj,' replied Tabu. Then Maharaj remarked: 'Look, if a mosquito sits on its horn, does the buffalo feel it or register any pain? Know us to be like that.'

Another time Brahmananda said: 'Remove all fear and weakness from your mind.

Never debase yourself by thinking about sin. Sin, however great it may seem in the eyes of man, is nothing in the eyes of God. One glance of His can uproot the sins of millions of births in a moment. In order to divert human beings from the path of sin, the scriptures mention heavy punishments for the sinner. Of course every action bears a result, and evil actions disturb one's peace of mind.'

In 1921 at Varanasi a young monk asked: 'Maharaj, I am practising japam and meditation mechanically and am not acquiring any taste for them. What should I do?'

Maharaj replied: 'Is it possible to get that taste in the beginning? You will have to struggle hard to attain it. Direct all your energy to that one pursuit.... Every night before you go to bed think for a while about how much time you have spent in doing good deeds, how much you have frittered away doing useless things, how much you have utilized in meditating, and how much you have wasted doing nothing at all.

'In the beginning it is good to make a routine and then follow it strictly. It does not matter whether your mind likes it or dislikes it. You must practise your japam and meditation as a daily routine.... You have received the precious mantram from your guru. Now dive deep into the ocean of Satchidananda. You have no self-reliance. Self-effort is indispensable in spiritual life. Do something for a period of at least four years. Then if you have not made any tangible progress come back and slap my face!'

The effect of holy company is infallible; it may come immediately or after a period of time. Those who came in contact with Brahmananda experienced a definite change in their lives. Brahmananda reminded the devotees: 'The holy company you keep, the spiritual talk you hear, all



make an impression on your mind. In the course of time you will realize the effects of these things and the momentous changes that they will bring about in your life. A bumble-bee hiding in a fragrant flower offered in the worship touches the feet of the Lord. Similarly, by the grace and association of a holy man, one surpasses even the gods and attains liberation.'

A real guru sometimes teaches through silence. Once Swami Satprakashananda came from Dhaka to see Brahmananda at Udbodhan. He bowed down to Maharaj and sat at his feet. Dhirananda (Maharaj's attendant) introduced him to Maharaj, saying, 'He has some questions.' Maharaj looked at him graciously and said, 'You have seen a holy man, have bowed down to him and touched his feet, what more questions can there be?' Satprakashananda wrote, 'Evidently he meant that this was enough to solve my problems and remove all doubts and difficulties from within.'

Maharaj once told Swami Prabhavananda: 'There are times when it becomes impossible for me to teach anyone. No matter where I look, I see only God wearing many masks. Who am I, the teacher? Who is to be taught? How can God teach God? But when my mind comes down again to a lower level, I see the ignorance in man and I try to remove it.'

### **Some Glimpses of Swami Brahmananda**

Sri Ramakrishna once remarked about Brahmananda: 'Rakhal is like the kind of mango that looks green even when ripe.' He meant that within Rakhal was a great spiritual power that he kept hidden from the outside world. Behind Brahmananda's grave exterior, he was like a frolicsome boy. He would joke and have fun with the monks and devotees. M. once told Vishwananda, a disciple of Maharaj: 'Observe how Maharaj acts and you will have some idea of what Sri

Ramakrishna was like. When his mind came down to the finite plane, his sense of humour was very keen.' 'This was also true of Maharaj,' wrote Prabhavananda. 'One of his favourite jokes was to have some fruits or sweets placed beside a disciple who was meditating. When the disciple had finished his meditation he would find his favourite dishes laid out before him. Later Maharaj would ask, "Well, did you get the fruits of your austerities?"'

Ashokananda recalled:

Everything he [Maharaj] did used to touch people's hearts at the deepest. Once a gentleman who came to visit him was asked to wait a few minutes, the swami would come. The few minutes ran into half an hour, and when Maharaj finally came, he said to the man in a rather embarrassed way: 'You see, I was playing cards; I couldn't break away. Please don't mind.' He said it with such simplicity that he stole the heart of that man.

His childlike moods were delightful. I remember seeing him once at a distance with a young brahmacharin attendant. He was dancing playfully about like a little boy and making gestures in imitation of a striking cobra. You would think a stalwart, middle-aged man would look very odd playing like that. But I can tell you it was the most beautiful thing to see. Why? Because this childlikeness was natural with him.

He was always fond of children; he liked to play with them, and they responded to his affection. One day when he was visiting Balaram Basu's family he dressed himself in a bearskin that covered him from head to foot and, thus disguised, appeared before Balaram's grandchildren to scare them. They screamed with genuine alarm, but after the first cry one little boy said through his tears: 'I know it's you, Maharaj. You can't



frighten me! But why did you do it?' Then Swami Brahmananda laid aside the bearskin and took the little boy on his lap.

Kiran (later, Swami Asheshananda), who was staying at Udbodhan, was sent to Brahmananda by Saradananda for his brahmacharya vows. When he approached Maharaj for his blessings, the swami was quiet for a while. Finally he said: 'Yes I will, but there is one condition. You must pay me 108 rupees in advance as *guru-dakshina* [honorarium for the guru]. Otherwise I can't initiate you.'

Stunned, Kiran replied: 'Maharaj, I have no money. It is impossible for me to pay such a large amount. If you don't bless me, I am lost.' Then Maharaj gravely said: 'I have a suggestion that will solve your problem. Swami Saradananda is very rich! He has all the money from the Udbodhan. You are his attendant. Go to Swami Saradananda and get him to pay that amount for you.'

'While I was standing there, speechless,' Asheshananda later wrote, 'Maharaj called another candidate over to him and said: 'Govinda, you come from Midnapore. You will have to dance after the fashion that Orissa people are fond of, for me. If you do it well, I will give you brahmacharya.' Without hesitation, Govinda performed the dance with suitable gestures of hand to our great delight. Maharaj was pleased with his performance and laughed heartily.

'Not knowing what else to do, I returned to Udbodhan and narrated the whole story to Swami Saradananda with great seriousness. He nodded gravely: "Very well, you may return to Belur Math and tell Maharaj that I am his and everything in Udbodhan belongs to him as well. What he asks for will be given."

'Relieved, I returned immediately to Belur Math, prostrated before Maharaj, and repeated Swami Saradananda's message. But to my surprise and dismay, Maharaj shook his head. "Empty words!" he shouted. "How am I to know if he will do as he promises with nothing in writing? You are his secretary. Prepare something for him to sign. When I have his signature, then I will believe it."

'Again I returned to Udbodhan, my mind in a turmoil.... Sadly I told Swami Saradananda this latest development.... The next day we both went to Belur Math and approached Maharaj. After a few moments in his presence, Swami Saradananda suggested it would be better if I waited outside. At length, Swami Saradananda came out of Maharaj's room and spoke to me, "It has been arranged that you will have your brahmacharya vows with the others."

Swami Satprakashananda wrote in his memoirs:

One day at the beginning of the winter season in 1917, in the drawing room of Balaram Mandir, Maharaj asked me to bring him pen, ink, and a piece of writing paper. When he began to dictate in English, I took down what he said.... The letter was addressed 'To the Abbot, Belur Monastery.' At the time, Swami Shivananda was in charge at the Belur Math, as respected Swami Premananda was lying ill in a small room of the Balaram Mandir.

The gist of the letter was: 'The Christmas celebration will surely be observed at your Math. On that occasion we — a party of monks — are coming to the Math. Your hospitality is well known. Certainly at the conclusion of the ceremony, according to the usual custom in Christmas celebrations, there will be an arrangement for the taking of drinks. We

are nonvegetarians and are fond of varied courses of meat dishes. In anticipation of a sumptuous feast, we extend to you our heartfelt thanks. May your function be crowned with success in all possible ways — that is our earnest wish.'

When I had written the letter, I handed it to him for his signature. But instead of putting his own name, he signed 'Premananda' and told me, 'Go and read the letter to Swami Premananda.' Hearing the contents of the letter and finding his signature forged, Swami Premananda simply smiled and said, 'Maharaj has a childlike nature.' One thing has to be especially noted here — both Swamis Premananda and Shivananda were vegetarians.

Later Maharaj asked me to go to Belur Math and deliver the letter to Swami Shivananda, but cautioned me not to mention that he had sent it. After reading through the letter, Swami Shivananda looked at me and said, laughing: 'Maharaj has sent this. Is it not?' I kept silent. Swami Shivananda understood, 'Silence is acquiescence.'

One morning when Maharaj was walking on the lawn of Belur Math, a young man humbly addressed him: 'I want to meet Swami Brahmananda. I would like to be a monk.' Pointing to Swami Shivananda, who was then taking tea, Maharaj said: 'You see that heavy-set person at the table, he is Brahmananda.' The young man bowed down to Shivananda and said: 'I have come to you.' Seeing that unknown person, Shivananda asked, 'Could you tell me the name of the person whom you want?'

'Swami Brahmananda.'

'He is walking there on the lawn,' said Shivananda.

'Sir, he has told me that you are Swami

Brahmananda.'

'No, I am not. Swami Brahmananda is walking there.'

When the young man returned to Maharaj and reported everything, Maharaj said: 'No, I am not Brahmananda. You see, great souls sometimes delude people and do not like to be caught. Go again and hold his feet firmly.'

The young man again went to Shivananda, got a nice scolding from him, and returned to Brahmananda again. Maharaj said to him: 'I have already told you that great souls delude people, and even beat people. But you should not leave him. Hold his two feet firmly.' The young man became confused, and tears came from his eyes. Then Maharaj compassionately said: 'All right, you can stay in the monastery.'

'It has been said,' wrote Christopher Isherwood, 'that Brahmananda was so entirely fearless that others could not feel fear in his presence. Once, when he was walking with two devotees in the woods of Bhuvaneshwar, a leopard appeared and came straight towards them. He stood still and confronted it calmly until it turned tail. Again, while he was going along a narrow lane in Madras, attended by two monks, a maddened bull came charging to meet them. The young men tried to protect their guru, who was already an elderly man, by standing in front of him; but he pushed them behind him with extraordinary strength and fixed his eyes upon the bull. It stopped, shook its head from side to side, and then trotted quietly away.'

Like other mystics, Brahmananda loved to be in solitude; at times he had no inclination to receive visitors. In 1916 when Maharaj was staying in Bangalore, Josephine MacLeod (an American devotee



of Swamiji) tried to have an interview with him. Whenever Maharaj would see her coming from a distance, he quickly disappeared into his room. He then sent Swami Nirmalananda to tell her, 'Maharaj is not well today.'

'After three days of trying, Miss MacLeod struck upon a plan. She put on a green dress which blended with the lush green scenery, and thus camouflaged, crept slowly along behind the trees and bushes towards the swami's veranda. Suddenly she leapt in front of him and exclaimed, "Naughty boy, now how will you escape?" The swami, embarrassed, stammered, "Today I am quite all right." Laughing, Joe said: "What else can you say? You have to admit it. I caught you, didn't I?"'

It is amazing and amusing to observe how a knower of God lives in this world and behaves with people. Sri Ramakrishna said about such an illumined soul: 'He acts like a child or a madman or an inert thing or a ghoul. While in the mood of a child, he sometimes shows childlike guilelessness, sometimes the frivolity of adolescence, and sometimes, while instructing others, the strength of a young man.'

Swami Sambhavananda recalled some of Maharaj's practical jokes:

There was a 'strong man' who advertised in the paper. The advertisement showed a picture of this man, fearfully muscular, with the caption: 'If you want to become like me ...' Maharaj would ask his cook or brahmachari attendant to take a stance like that of the muscle-man and call out: 'If you want to become like me...'

Maharaj liked to play word games with Swami Varadananda. In one kind of game the first person tries to think of a word for which the opponent cannot find a rhyming word. For example, Maharaj might call out 'cricket.' If Swami

Varadananda could think of no rhyming word he would lose that round. But if he replied, for example, 'wicket,' then Maharaj lost, unless he in turn would think of a third rhyming word. One evening Maharaj kept Swami Varadananda playing the game for an hour and a half. Swami Varadananda was in the kitchen and Maharaj was on the veranda. I was the go-between, carrying the words back and forth. Swami Varadananda finally got bored with the game and sent me to Maharaj with the message, 'It is late at night.' Quickly Maharaj sent back his response, keeping intact his record for rarely being defeated, 'Tell him "good night."'

There are hundreds of stories about Brahmananda's playful jokes. Once a devotee complained: 'Maharaj, people come to hear your spiritual talk, and you entertain them with funny jokes.' Maharaj answered seriously: 'Look, householders are burning with miseries almost all the time, so I give them some momentary joy. There are very few persons in this world who want spirituality. Those who are sincere, I talk to them about God; and I know they will listen to my spiritual instructions and follow them. That is why I don't talk about spiritual matters to all. It is not so easy to practise spiritual disciplines — it needs good *samskaras* [tendencies] from a previous life.'

Unconditional love and compassion are the two main traits in the mind of an illumined soul. Brahmananda's love was completely natural and he would shower it on each and all — even the animals, trees, and plants were not deprived of it. He fed the dog of the monastery; he regularly visited the cowshed and supervised the cows. He kept his eyes on the flower and vegetable gardens of each monastery. Under his supervision South Indian flower and fruit trees were planted in North Indian centres and



vice versa. He had a wide range of knowledge in gardening matters. He taught the monks how to water and fertilize the trees and how to control pests.

Maharaj had a keen interest in plant life. Boshi Sen reminisced:

Once he expressed a desire to see some of J. C. Bose's famous experiments showing the sensitivity of plants to external stimuli. When he visited the [Bose Research] Institute, he watched the experiments we demonstrated for him with great interest. That evening he was still preoccupied with what he had seen in the laboratory. 'There was a time,' he told me, 'when Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] could not step on the grass but would jump from one bare spot to another to avoid hurting the grass. At that time we simply didn't believe that grass could be sensitive. From what I saw today, I realized how infallibly true his perceptions were.'

Later in Bhuvaneswar he said: 'Trees have life. If you serve them you will feel it. Trees never become ungrateful. He who serves them will receive flowers and fruits in return.' In Bangalore, when he saw the rose garden of Lalbagh, Maharaj remarked, 'Look, the celestial maidens are laughing.' And pointing at the green lawn, he said, 'As if the Divine Mother has spread green velvet.' With his mystical eyes he would see the worship of the Cosmic God all around him. One day a brahmachari at Belur Math was picking flowers from the garden for worship of the Master. Observing him plucking the big ones in front, Maharaj told him sharply: 'What are you doing? Do you want to make that tree devoid of flowers? You think Sri Ramakrishna is seated only in the shrine and does not come to the garden. Pick those flowers for worship that are hidden under the leaves and always leave some flowers in

each tree.' Maharaj saw that those trees were also worshipping the Cosmic God with their blossoms.

### Towards the End

Sri Ramakrishna had made a prediction about Brahmananda to his close disciples: 'When Rakhal knows his real nature, his body will not last anymore.' The Master never told Rakhal about this vision, and he forbade his disciples to reveal it as well. About 1910, when Saradananda was publishing *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* (*Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*) in Bengali, Premananda went to visit him in Udbodhan. Saradananda read to Premananda from his manuscript about the Master's vision concerning Maharaj. Startled, Premananda said: 'Sharat, what have you done? Maharaj is still living. Don't you remember what the Master said, "When Rakhal knows his real nature, his body will not last anymore."' Immediately Saradananda removed that part from his manuscript and also called back the proof from the press and destroyed it.

One night, while Maharaj was living at Balaram's, he suddenly had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master appeared before Maharaj and disappeared without saying anything. Brahmananda sat on his bed and tried to understand the meaning of that vision. He then said to his attendant: 'Suddenly my sleep broke, and I saw the Master standing near my bed. He didn't say a single word. I couldn't figure out the cause of his sudden appearance and disappearance.' Pausing a little he gravely said: 'I have no desire in my mind. I don't even have the desire to chant his name — only to surrender and surrender.'

On 1 January 1921, while Maharaj was in Balaram's house, Ramlal, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, came from Dakshineswar to see him. Immediately Maharaj



became jubilant. Ramlal was very dear to him and reminded him of his days in Dakshineswar. Maharaj would tease Ramlal since he was very simple and guileless. Maharaj said to him: 'Brother, you will have to dress this evening as a gypsy woman and sing the songs that the Master used to sing.' Ramlal shyly replied: 'Maharaj, it is not the monastery. It is a devotee's house; moreover, people may misunderstand me, especially women.' But when Maharaj insisted, Ramlal agreed.

In the evening Maharaj's attendants borrowed ladies' garments and jewelry from Balaram's family and decorated Ramlal. Maharaj sat on his chair in the big hall; the disciples and devotees sat around him, and the ladies watched from the veranda. As soon as Ramlal entered the hall the audience smiled. He began to sing and dance, twisting his waist and gesturing with his hands before Maharaj. This is part of that song:

*Ekbār broje chulo brojeswar dinek  
dūyer mato*

O Lord of Vraja (Krishna is the Lord of Vraja; Vraja refers to his childhood haunt, Vrindaban), let us go to Vraja for a few days.

*(O tor) mon māne to thākbi sethā noile  
āsbi druto*

If you like that place, stay there or return quickly.

*Age Rākhāl chile ekhon rājā hoyecho*

Previously you were a cowherd, and now you have become a king, etc.

When Ramlal repeated the last line, Maharaj's smiling face turned grave. That first line had reminded him of his real nature, and immediately the whole atmosphere changed. He realized what Sri Ramakrishna had seen in a vision long ago about his true nature. He also understood why the Master had silently appeared before him. Maharaj began to prepare himself for his

final journey, fulfilling his unfinished mission.

On 19 January 1921 Maharaj left for Varanasi with Saradananda to settle an organizational problem, and then returned to Belur Math on 16 March. Then he left for Bhubaneswar with Shivananda on 1 April and afterwards went to Madras on 25 April. This was his last visit to South India. He initiated many people, inspired the monks, and solidified the activities of the Order there. Then in November he returned to Bhubaneswar and went to Belur Math on 12 January 1922. He attended Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration at Belur Math on 28 February, and initiated three monks into sannyasa. Then one day he said to a monk: 'Today I shall initiate. Call all who want initiation.' His attendant Varadananda remarked: 'He never speaks that way. Is he going to give up his body?' Another day he said to one of his brother disciples, 'I am now relinquishing my responsibilities, please take care of everything.'

On 22 March Brahmananda left Belur Math for Balaram's house. Before departing he carefully studied the plan for the Master's temple that had been made under Swamiji's direction and reminded the monks that it was their duty to complete the project. On 24 March Maharaj contracted cholera at Balaram's and all the best physicians of Calcutta attended upon him. He recovered from cholera within a week, but his diabetes (which started in 1918) now took a serious turn. All kinds of treatment — allopathic, homeopathic, and ayurvedic — were administered to him, but to no avail.

He told his attendants: 'Take me to Bhubaneswar. If I drink that well-water, I shall be all right. I don't care for this polluted air of Calcutta. The air of Bhubaneswar is clean — take me there.' One attendant said to him, 'Maharaj, you are too weak at pre-



sent.'

When Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati, a noted ayurvedic physician, came to see Brahmananda, he wore a religious mark *vibhuti* (ashes) on his forehead. Observing it Maharaj remarked, 'Sir, the mark of Shiva, which is on your forehead, signifies that Shiva alone is real, everything else is unreal.' M. visited Maharaj and asked him if he had any pain. Maharaj calmly replied, 'Pain takes to its wings when I think how joyfully I passed each day with the Master.'

On Saturday, 8 April, the burning sensation in his body and his thirst for water increased. At noon, seeing the ladies of Balaram's family crying, Maharaj said to them: 'Why are you so afraid? I bless you all.' In the evening Dr. Durgapada Ghosh came and inquired about his discomfort. Maharaj answered with a line from *Vivekachudamani*: "'To endure all kinds of afflictions without caring to redress them" — this is my present condition' (verse 24). All of a sudden his face glowed and he became absorbed in deep meditation.

At 9:00 p.m. he touched the hand of his attendant, who was seated nearby, and blessed him saying: 'Don't be afraid, my son. You have served me well. Be absorbed in God. I bless you — you will attain the knowledge of Brahman. I say you will attain the knowledge of Brahman.' After a while he blessed other monastic attendants: 'Never forget God, and you will realize the highest good. Do not grieve. I shall be with you always.' Then he inquired about Saradananda, who would stay the whole day with Maharaj and at night would return to Udbodhan. A monk immediately ran to Udbodhan to bring Saradananda.

A deep silence pervaded the room. The monks and devotees encircling Maharaj were anxious. He opened his eyes again and

began to speak: 'I am floating on the banyan leaf of faith in the ocean of Brahman. Vivek — my Vivek — Vivekananda-dada [brother]! Baburam-da, Baburam-da [Premananda]! Yogen — Yogen [Yogananda]! I see the feet of Sri Ramakrishna!' Thus he was seeing and addressing the deceased disciples of the Master.

In the meantime Saradananda arrived. Seeing him Maharaj said: 'Brother Sharat, you have come. My knowledge of Brahman and Vedanta are getting mixed up. You are a knower of Brahman, please tell me about it.'

'My goodness!' replied Saradananda, 'You are full of that knowledge. The Master gave you everything.'

Then Maharaj said: 'The Master is real and so is his *lila* [divine play]. I have almost reached Brahman — only a little veil is left.' He wanted to drink a little lemonade and then said with a smile: 'Look, what is this? I am saying Brahman, Brahman, and again lemonade, lemonade!' He continued: 'Father in Heaven — look, this is a wonderful idea. It is also a path of God.'

When Saradananda suggested that he sleep after drinking a little lemonade, Maharaj said: 'My mind is in the realm of Brahman. It does not come down. All right, pour lemonade into Brahman!' After sipping a little he said: 'Aha-ha, Brahman — the Reality — the vast ocean! *Om Parabrahmane namah* [salutations to the supreme Brahman]; *Om Paramatmiane namah* [salutations to the supreme Atman]!' When Maharaj described his experience of Brahman, all felt peace and serenity in their hearts.

He slowly calmed down. His face was glowing with joy and he gazed without blinking as if he were meditating, or seeing something. After a while he exclaimed in his



sweet voice:

Ah, here is the full moon — Ramakrishna! I want the Krishna of Ramakrishna. I am the cowherd boy of Vrindaban. Put anklets on my feet. I want to dance holding the hand of my Krishna. Jhum — Jhum — Jhum! [It refers to the sound of the anklets.] Krishna, Krishna, Krishna has come. Can't you see him? You don't have the eyes. Aha-ha, how beautiful! My Krishna — on the lotus — of Vrindaban! It is not sad-Krishna. My play is over now. Look, the child Krishna is caressing me. He is calling me to come away with him. I am coming.... Om Vishnu, Om Viśhnu, Om Vishnu!

Maharaj greeted Shivananda and Abhedananda who came to see him. Saradananda later said: 'This time we shall not be able to keep Maharaj anymore. His vision of Krishna on the lotus, which the Master forbade us to disclose to him, has come out from his own lips.'

The doctors expected him to fall into a coma, but he was fully conscious until the end. Boshi Sen wrote in his memoirs: 'An hour before he gave up his body, he ceased speaking and seemed to have withdrawn to some distant realm beyond the reach of any of us. I was very gently stroking his palm and wondering whether he still remem-

bered that old playful pressure of his thumb. At the same instant I felt it, light but unmistakable, Maharaj's last bequest to me.'

Ramakrishna's prophecy about his spiritual son Rakhal proved to be true. At 8:45 p.m. on Monday, 10 April 1922, Swami Brahmananda passed away. The next day his body was carried from Calcutta to Belur Math and cremated on the bank of the Ganges. Later a temple was built on that spot.

The monks and devotees lost their spiritual teacher, but they preserved some of his precious verbal testimonies in their records. Once in Belur Math a young monk asked Brahmananda: 'Maharaj, does Sri Ramakrishna exist even now?' Maharaj answered: 'I see you have lost your mind. Having renounced hearth and home, why are we leading such a life? He exists always. Pray to him day and night for his vision. He will dispel all your doubts and will make you understand his true nature.'

'Do you see the Master nowadays?'

'Yes,' replied Maharaj, 'I see him whenever he shows himself out of his mercy. Anyone who has his grace can see him. But how many people have that love and longing to see him?' □

...from Truth we have come and not from falsehood. Blessed are they who realize that they have come out of Truth. In Truth they have life, and into Truth they will merge. And unfortunate are they who believe that out of matter they have come and that it is the world that gives them life. They are thirsting for life and courting death; they are seeking misery, imagining it to be happiness; they are drinking poison and taking it for nectar.

—Swami Ramakrishnananda, *Precepts for Perfection*, pp. 98–9

# Consciousness in Vedanta

SWAMI PRABUDDHANANDA

*Swami Prabuddhananda is the spiritual leader of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco. This is a transcription of a half-hour talk given by him on 10 September 1994 in Berkeley, California, at the Agency for Human Interconnectedness through Manifestation of Spiritual Awareness (AHIMSA) Conference: 'In Search of Consciousness'. Two other lectures appeared in Prabuddha Bharata, 1997, November and December issues.*

I am very happy to be here this afternoon. I am very grateful to Dr. Mehta and other members of Ahimsa for inviting me to this meeting.

It is always a joy to share with others some ideas about consciousness in which all of us are interested. Personally speaking, it is very beneficial to me to discuss, or think about, or handle in any way this beautiful subject for the simple reason that we see consciousness pulsating everywhere—within us and all around us. Whatever may be our present understanding of consciousness, however crude may be our definition of it, we need not worry about that. Nobody can give a *perfect* definition of consciousness. However, we see that Vedanta teachers *dared* to define this—call it indefinable thing. Yes, we want to define it, because endowed with a pure scientific spirit, how can we admit that there can be anything that is impossible to define! So we shall try to define it.

Take this little sprout [of grass or anything]. Think of it—just a seed and a sprout. They are bristling with life. It is conscious life. It is conscious! And a child—a little child running about, it too is conscious, so beautiful. And a brilliant mind—it is beautiful. So wherever there is that consciousness we feel joy.

One of our previous speakers men-

tioned, 'awakened consciousness'. Is there anything to be awakened regarding consciousness? Is it necessary to qualify consciousness with the adjective awakened? When we are asleep, we are not conscious. When we are conscious, there is nothing to be awakened! So we say, 'that is conscious which is always awake'.

I shall now present before you some of the ideas of Vedanta regarding consciousness. In Vedanta this subject is viewed from different angles. I am not going to exhaust all those viewpoints in a short talk. Yet it is something like this: Suppose I want to say something about space. Where is the beginning of space? And where is the end of space? Yet I *can* begin somewhere, and I can end somewhere. I can take up the subject, say a few words and then just after half-an-hour I can stop. So discussing about consciousness is also like this. In discussing it I can begin somewhere, and I can end somewhere; but that does not mean I have exhausted the subject. I look at it [the subject] *this* way or I look at it *that* way—that is all. Afterwards there will still be many other ways of looking at it. And it will still be inexhaustible. It is infinite. With this introduction let me begin.

In Vedanta, how do we arrive at the concept of consciousness, or the experience



of consciousness? It is somewhat like this: You know, radium was discovered after Madame Curie found something emanating from that ore she had in her laboratory. It was disturbing some photographic plates she had in the laboratory. Afterwards, to investigate the source of the emissions she distilled and distilled and distilled the ore and finally radium was isolated. Please remember this technique: This indicates the Vedantic method of investigating consciousness. Sometimes the investigation is done in a **philosophical** way, purely by intellectual work: one thought leading to another, and that to another, through analysis and inquiry. Another way is more **psychological**. Psychologically, how do you *feel* about it? It is an internal subjective study—what is this consciousness that *I* am experiencing? Another way of investigating the facts about it is **socially**. Some are more aware socially—socially conscious. So he investigates consciousness that way, whereas someone else is rather dumb socially. And there is yet another way. We call it, as some of the previous speakers have mentioned, the method of *meditation*. I would expand this method however, I would not say 'meditation', I would use another word: *yoga*. Meditation is only one part of yoga. There are other yogas too. Or, you could call it the **spiritual** way of investigation. So, there are the philosophical way, the psychological way, the social way, and the spiritual way—all these are genuine methods. I will not deal with them separately because when we speak of one method the others always become mingled in.

The idea is this: that you do 'distillation'.... Just as Madame Curie distilled radium out of that ore, we want to 'distill consciousness' here this afternoon—first in terms of understanding, and afterwards in terms of *experience* (speaker's emphasis). Radium is not just a theory or a thing of imagination. I can experience that; it is a fact to be investigated and experimented. So how to

'distill' consciousness? There is an ancient Sanskrit word for this process. It is called *tapas*. You know, any distillation requires a lot of heat. We need to supply heat. Some heat is to be applied, whether intellectually you inquire and think deeply on this, or psychologically you try to analyse your feelings and emotions, or analyse human relationships, or adopt the spiritual method of yoga. You heat and heat and heat the thing and let the dross, the impurities, be burnt, be discarded. When all the impurities are got rid of, you see the pure consciousness. Herein is the method and the end result. So we shall take this up.

How do we arrive at this concept of consciousness through *tapas*? It is as follows: I am conscious of you all now. You understand, 'I am conscious of you', and when I say, 'I am conscious of you', Vedanta teachers understand by that assertion several different things. When I am not very cultured or mature inside, when I am an immature being, when I say 'I have a car', for example, say a Mercedes Benz, it is not 'I *have* a Mercedes Benz', it is 'I *am* the Mercedes Benz'—that is, I get totally identified with the Mercedes Benz. It is said to be a very primitive stage of human existence when I say 'I am that'. But slowly, when we refine ourselves, what happens is, my consciousness is not only of things 'outside'; I become more and more aware of the 'inside' too. That is, 'I *have* a Mercedes Benz'; I have my body *too*. I see they are separate. My 'I-ness' or 'I-sense' was in the beginning in my Mercedes Benz. Then it comes to my body and I say, 'This, my body, is me'. And then my mind appears on the scene too. And my 'I-sense' comes in too. What now am 'I'? Now I say, 'I am my mind'. And then my identity goes to my personality, my ego. Then *that ego* is me! That little ego is me. So when the 'I-sense' is expanding or when it is withdrawing (it does not matter which), slowly we conceive of that *pure* 'I-sense' in me—not objectified. The Vedanta teachers



say, when you refine yourself, in any way you like—by expanding or withdrawing—, some voice will speak to you from inside yourself saying, as it were, 'I am' ... 'I am' ... 'I am'. Something flashes in you: 'I am' ... 'I am' ... 'I am'. *That* is consciousness. That is one definition.

Another method is this: In my waking state I am aware of so many things: Things are there; people are there; I am talking—all these I am aware of. This we can call Awareness-I. And when I go to sleep, I am dreaming. (I was very glad to hear from one of the previous speakers that sleep is a very dynamic state. I was very happy to hear that.) At that time in sleep when I was dreaming, the [knowledge] came: 'Now I am a scientist', 'now I am the President of the United States', or, 'I have become a dog'. So all sorts of fanciful things go on in a dream. But *in* the dream state it is all very coherent. No dreamer thinks there is anything incoherent in his dream. No incongruity is there. When I am dreaming, all the dream elements are well connected. First I was a scientist, then the President of the United States,—what's wrong about it?—I am a dog afterwards, it's perfectly alright. And we can call this Awareness-II. And there is yet another kind of awareness when you go into deep sleep without any dreams. Call that Awareness-III. After Awareness-I, Awareness-II and Awareness-III are considered, we conceive also of an Awareness-IV. Awareness-IV is that awareness in us which observes all other awarenesses: Awareness-I, Awareness-II, Awareness-III. That Awareness-IV is consciousness. That is the pure observer, that is the consciousness.

Take the case of energy, for example. I am experiencing energy now in many forms: electrical energy, psychic energy, and many other different forms of energy are being emitted and manifested here. And we conceive of a primordial energy. That in Vedanta is called 'She'. It is She—primordial Energy or *Shakti*. And She is Consciousness.

We are familiar with the process of understanding. We say the 'light of understanding has come to me'. Where does this light come from? It is coming from deep within me. And, if we isolate that, that light within is Consciousness.

Coming to the social side, I love my family—it is good. Then, I extend the boundaries of my family. My neighbourhood becomes my family too. In this way I break down the barriers successively—break down barriers continuously. Afterwards you will feel 'the whole universe is mine', 'I love the whole universe'. That universal love is Consciousness.

And take the sense of joy, for example. I eat some ice cream. I wanted to eat some ice cream; I was hankering to eat ice cream. Finally, I do eat ice cream. If we analyse this, what do we see? According to Vedanta teachers: I had a great desire to eat ice cream and of that ice cream I ate a little. At that time what happened? I say, 'I *enjoyed* the ice cream.' Where did the joy come from? That is a big question there! About this the—call them scientists, or psychologists, or mystics—say, 'When you ate that, just at that moment you became desireless. Just at that moment, that very moment, when you became desireless, something welled up from within. You call that joy.' We also say, 'I enjoyed ice cream', but the joy comes from within! And a very important question arises: If the joy is coming from within, then why do you *need* the ice cream at all? (*laughter*). These Vedantic mystics say, You have asked the right question there—you *don't* need it! Ice cream is only a *suggestion* for getting joy for an immature person, or one who is not refined himself (like all of us)—an immature person. Supposing I refine myself in some way. Can I not get that joy *without* these external suggestions? They say yes. And That is Consciousness. That joy is not dependent on things which *are* there or *are not* there. It is independent, it is free. That free joy within, unconditioned joy within,



*That* is consciousness.

Take the case of the sense of beauty. I say there is a beautiful flower there. All people do not enjoy that beauty; it is enjoyed only by one who has that aesthetic sense inside. With that aesthetic sense he sees a lot of beauty there. But, for all others it is just some object, that is all. You may just crush it, what is that to him? What is there in a flower? But an artist sees beauty there. Think of the artistic sense or the sense within me to perceive beauty. So Vedanta applies this method of reasoning everywhere. Where did the beauty of the flower come from? Do you *need* that flower at all to feel *that* sense of beauty? They say no, you don't need that flower. That is only a suggestion for an average mind. For someone who is more evolved, more refined, that is not necessary. That beauty is within. You can enjoy that unconditioned beauty. That beauty is Consciousness. And these examples go on endlessly. Many more can be given.

The whole idea is this: the process is a kind of de-programming. We are all familiar with de-programming. In Vedanta we call it de-superimposition. That means, whatever has covered this pure Consciousness, we remove that. Remove the debris. Or, in religious or spiritual language, purify yourself. To quote the Bible: 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' [I don't know whether the word God is allowed here. Alright? (*laughter*). Anyway it is that.] When you purify the mind then you can isolate this consciousness. You can feel its presence. You can feel the pure presence of *That*. You and I can do it, because It is the very source of everything, the source of that 'I-sense' in me, the source of light, and you can say the source of strength. Where does strength come from? You analyse and try to remove the impurities, either by the psychological way, or the philosophical way, or the social way or the yogic way; you can isolate that Consciousness.

There is a small story told by a modern

mystic to summarize all this. A man kept a solution of dye in a tub. You can visualize that. In the small town in which he lived, he used to stand with his tub of dye and customers used to come with their cloths to be dyed. Someone comes and the dyer asks, 'What colour do you want?' and he says, 'I want red.' He would take the cloth and put it in the tub of dye and taking it out say, 'Here is your red cloth.' Another person comes: 'What do you want?' 'I want it coloured blue.' He would take the cloth, put it in the same liquid and give it to the customer saying, 'Here, it is blue!' Another comes and says, 'I want it dyed green.' He puts the cloth in the same liquid and says, 'Here, this is green.' And so on and on. A bystander was watching all this. Then he brought out his cloth and the dyer asked, 'What colour do you want?' He said, 'I want it in the colour of the liquid you have in your tub!' Then the dyer-man simply smiled. So, when Dr. Mehta asked me to talk on this 'Consciousness', I should simply have smiled and then gone (*laughter*).

So that mysterious liquid in the tub is Consciousness. From that Consciousness all colours have come. Everything has come from that only. It may be 'I-sense' or awareness, or energy, or light, love, bliss, beauty, or strength and so on. And Vedanta says, This is to be found out. After distillation (*tapas*) you get *this*. This mysterious thing, you may call 'I'—no objection!; 'He'?—perfectly alright!; 'She'?—Very good!; 'It'?—Fine!; 'Brahman'?—It's alright!; how about 'Buddha-nature'?—Go ahead!; 'Allah'?—Quite right!; 'Father-in-Heaven'?—Fine!; 'Jehova'?—Equally alright!; 'Jesus'?—Equally alright!; 'Krishna'?—Fine!; 'Shiva'?, 'Vishnu'?—All these are alright! So that one consciousness can be viewed in all these different ways. And how about our world-view? How does it affect us—you and me? On one side you can say it's all projected from within, it is true.

Vedanta has many views. Regarding



creation there are four or five views that are all accepted. They are there. I'll tell you one of them. It is this: What you call this world—what you call this universe, the world and life and everything; whether psychological or physical,—all these are *appearances* of the one Consciousness. It is Consciousness alone which is appearing like this. As the one electro-magnetic vibration vibrates in different wave amplitudes and frequencies producing red light, green light, blue light, and so on of differing intensities, the One is appearing as the many. Take any among the many, any one, if you analyse it you will see Consciousness. For pure Consciousness where should you go? The best laboratory and the best specimen is right here with you. The best specimen is you yourself! The best laboratory is your own life. And your whole life—that is your laboratory. In that laboratory you experiment and realize the Truth or Reality—this Consciousness.

Whatever you perceive is the expression of *That*. It is the expression of God, it is the expression of this Love, and it is the expression of this Energy. It is all pure. And if you want to use the word God—by this time you are familiar with this word, God—you can use that. It is in me, in you, and everywhere. When you want to realize or find *This*, wherever you go, it is alright. According to Christian belief if you want to go to Father-in-Heaven, Go ahead! It is fine. Or, according to Buddhism, you want to go to Buddha-nature—Go ahead, it is equally alright. Or, you want to have Krishna-Consciousness; or if you don't want any of these things; you want just that Witness-Consciousness—Go ahead! Or, as one of the modern Vedantists, Sri Ramana Maharshi, used to say about that 'I-Consciousness': Go on analysing and analysing and analysing; soon you will come to your Real 'I', and that

is perfection. That is salvation. That is freedom.

This morning we heard that we are all sisters and brothers (in a song). How are we all sisters and brothers? I am in one wave-length of Consciousness. You are in another wave-length of the same Consciousness. That is why we are sisters and brothers. We are all expressions of That. *We are That*. We are different aspects of that Consciousness. That is why we are sisters and brothers. We are all one, and that is why when we hear that word *oneness*, we are inspired. It feels fine. Love. We have to love everyone. We get a nice feeling from it. Why do we get that nice feeling? It is because your *self* is everywhere. When I felt: 'The Mercedes Benz is me', I got a great joy. Now what has happened is 'the whole world is me'. So what an amount of joy I am going to get!

Remember the words of another modern Vedantist. She said, 'Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger here.' That is the truth of Consciousness. No one is a stranger. It is all mine. Wherever you go, it is 'my country', 'my people', 'my things'—irrespective of caste or creed, or colour, or nationality, or race, or religion, or whatever. They are all mine. So Consciousness is the basis for all these—at the intellectual level, at the emotional level. You can *feel* It and *experience* It. It is my property, as also your property. Everyone's true nature or *svarūpa* is this Consciousness.

I shall end with a short prayer:

सर्वस्तरतु दुर्गाणि सर्वो भद्राणि पश्यतु।  
सर्वः सद्बुद्धिमाप्नोतु सर्वः सर्वत्र नन्दतु॥

*May all be freed from dangers,  
May all see good everywhere,  
May all be actuated by noble thoughts,  
May all rejoice everywhere. □*

God's name has in it all the requisite powers in a latent form.

—Swami Shivananda, *For Seekers of God*, p. 243

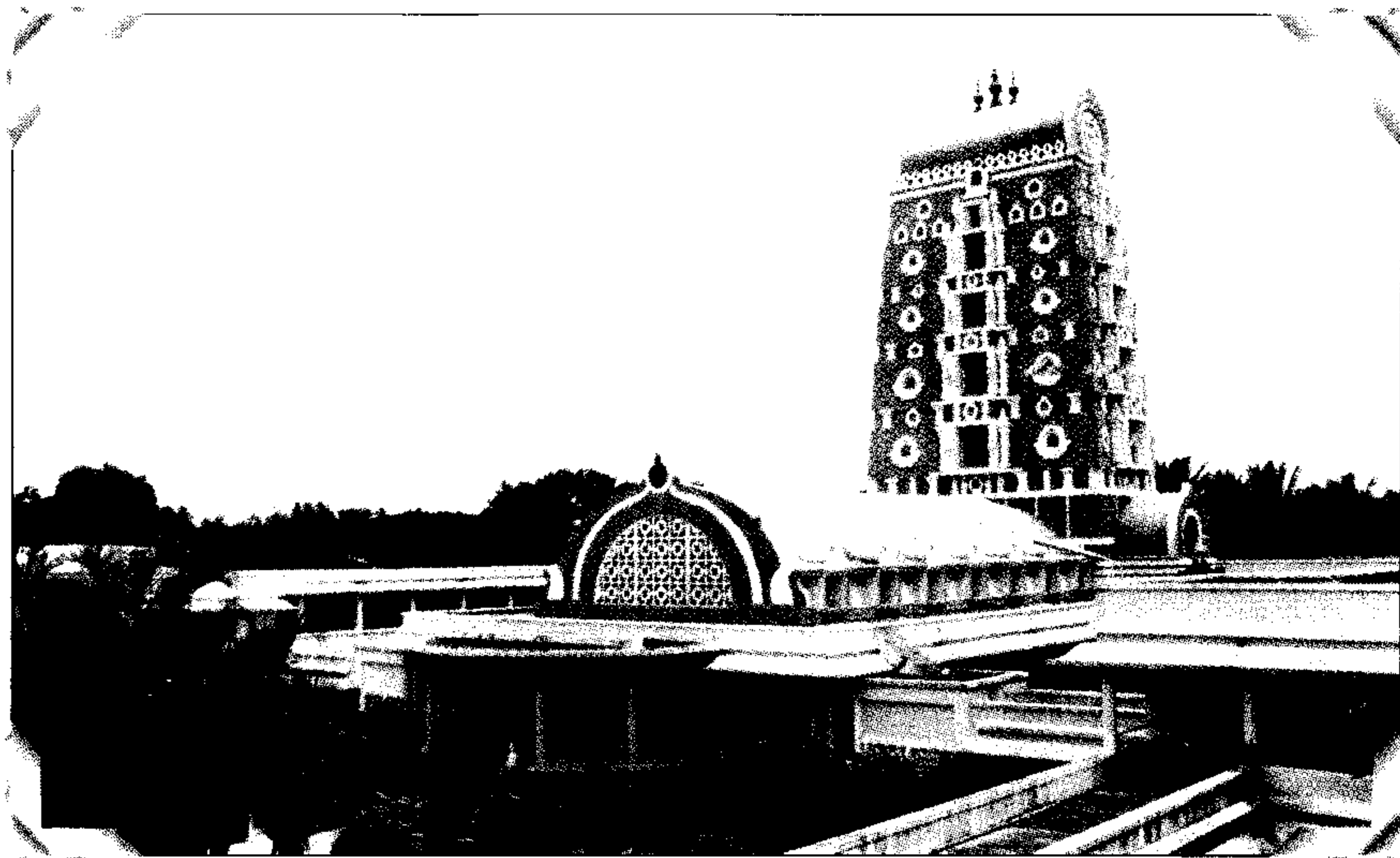




*A full view of Sri Ramakrishna Temple*

*Monks' Quarter-cum-dining hall and kitchen*



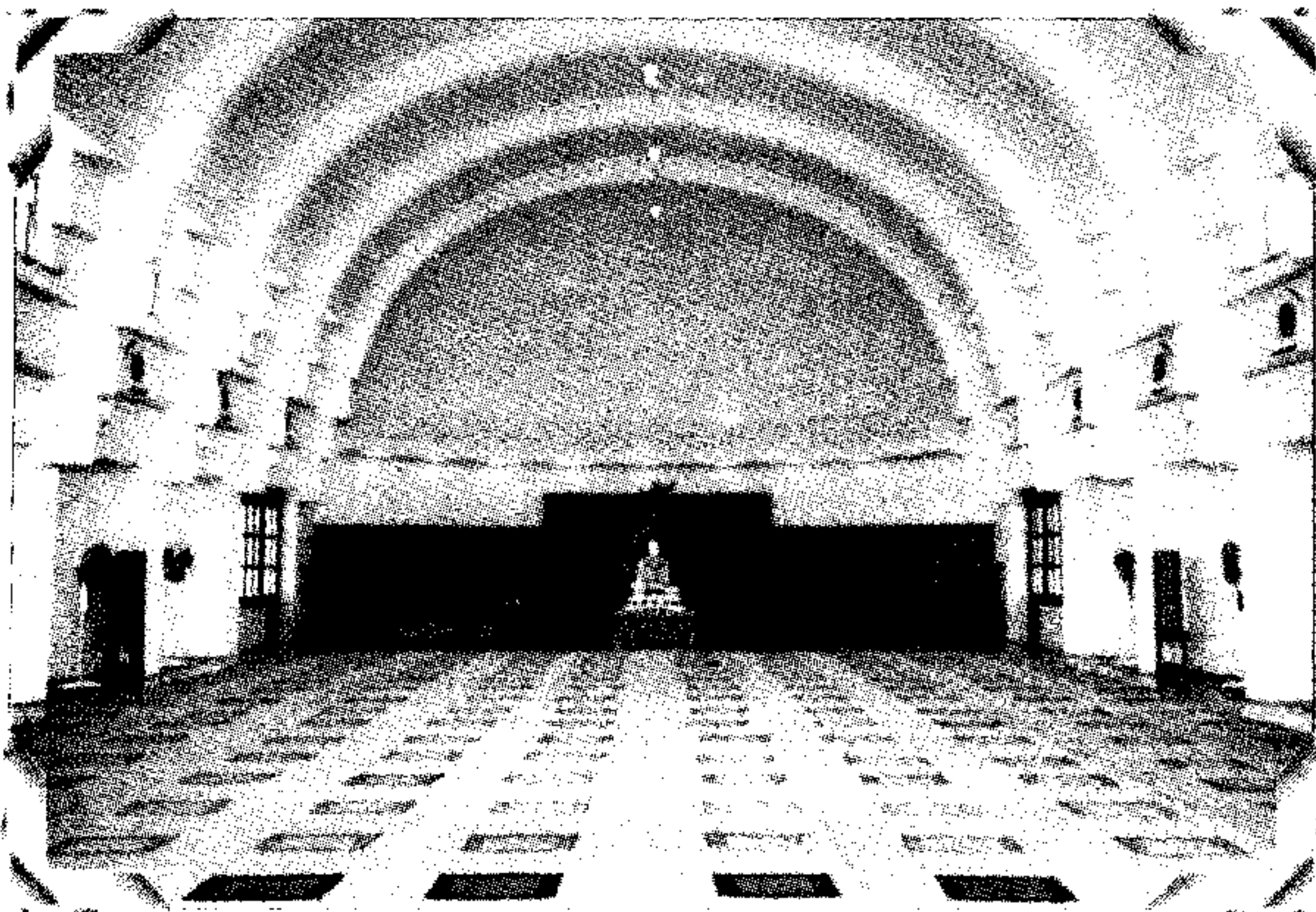


*A full view of the prayer hall with the Gopuram*

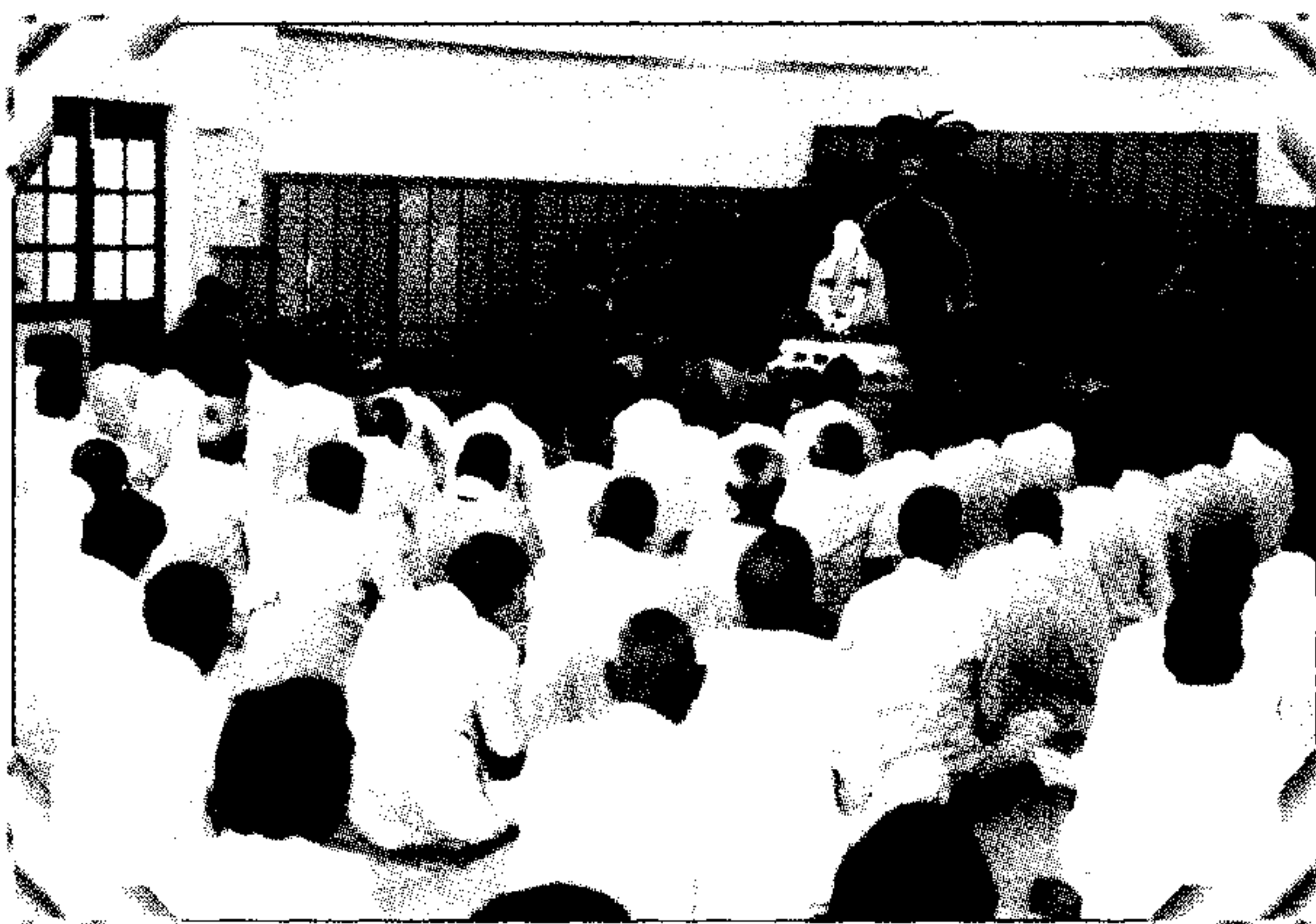
*A Panoramic view of the Vidyashala Building  
with the swimming pool in front*



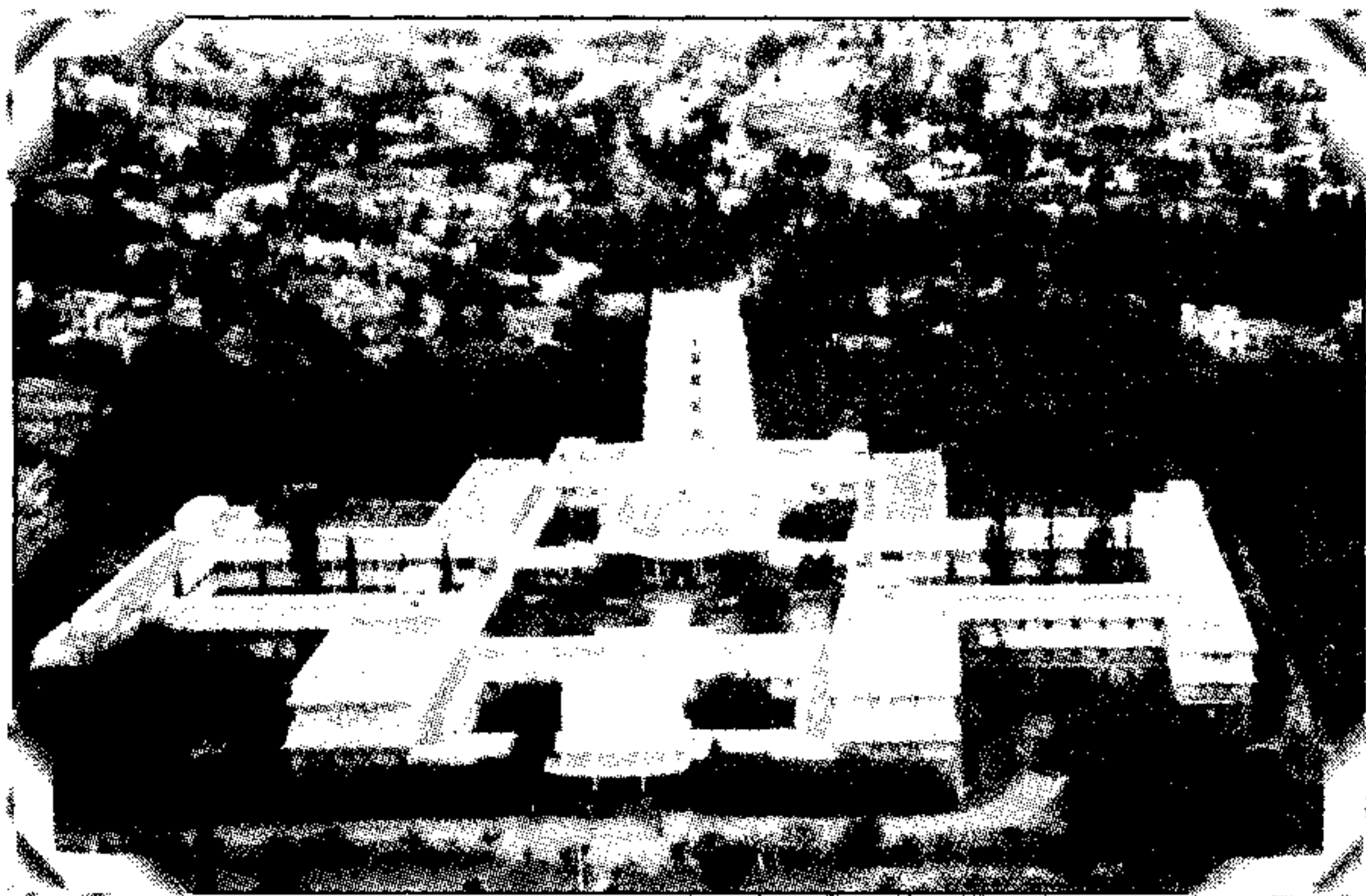




*Prayer Hall—inside view*

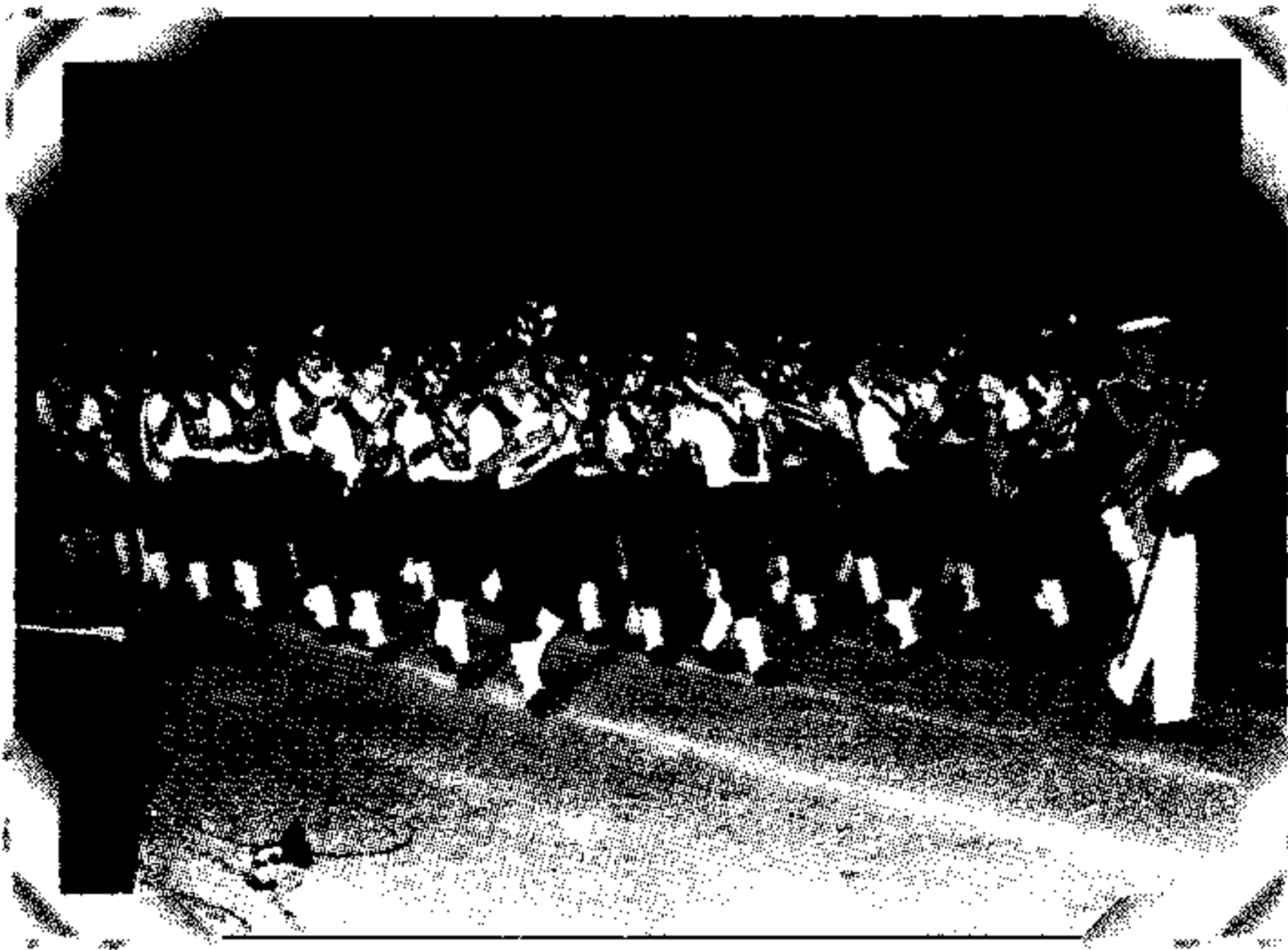


*Retreat for Character building  
in Progress at RIMSE*



*RIMSE — an overview*





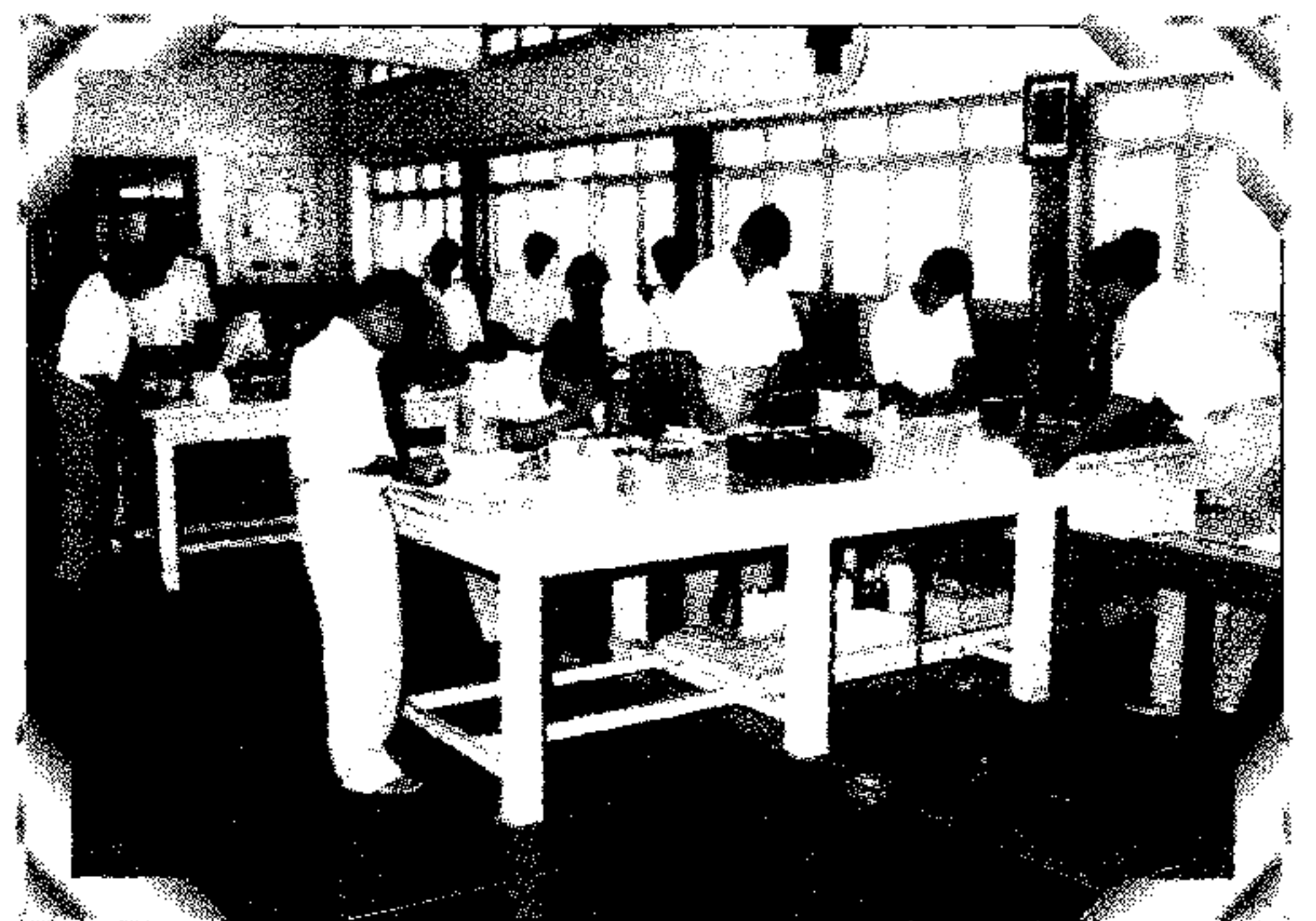
*Vidyashala Band Troop*



*A scene from Dramatics—Vidyashala*



*Cultural Programme at Vidyashala*



*Students at Work—Physics Laboratory*